

PENELOPE *and the*
GOLDEN ORCHARD

by DOROTHEA CASTELHUN

~~My~~ ~~Christina~~ ~~to~~
~~mother~~ ~~from~~
~~My~~ ~~11/16~~

**PENELOPE AND
THE GOLDEN ORCHARD**

THE PENELOPE BOOKS

BY .

DOROTHEA CASTELHUN



Each, 12mo, cloth, illustrated, \$1.90



PENELOPE'S PROBLEMS

PENELOPE AND THE GOLDEN
ORCHARD

THE HOUSE IN THE GOLDEN
ORCHARD



L. C. PAGE & COMPANY (INC.)

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“PEN FLUSHED UNHAPPILY.” (See page 209.)

PENELOPE

AND THE

GOLDEN ORCHARD

BY
DOROTHEA CASTELHUN

AUTHOR OF
"PENELOPE'S PROBLEMS," Etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY
WILLIAM C. McNULTY



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TO ELSA

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Penelope and the Golden Orchard

CHAPTER I

A RAINY SATURDAY

“I THINK a rainy Saturday is just horrid,” complained Evelyn, “specially now that school’s begun and you have to stay cooped up all week anyhow.”

She set down the cup she had wiped and took another from the drainer, handling the dishes daintily with the tips of her fingers. All her movements were slow and careless, and it was quite evident from her manner that she hated what she was doing.

Pen stood with hands plunged into the hot soapy water, washing the dishes with brisk thoroughness and speed. She was aware that this annoyed her cousin intensely, but since Evelyn’s laziness was just as irritating to her, Pen did not slow down her motions.

It was a very rainy day, with the kind of

steady, driving rain that threatens to continue for hours without let up. From the kitchen window beside the sink where they were doing the breakfast dishes, Pen looked out upon a dreary scene. The vegetable garden, just beyond the stretch of the soggy, untidy grass plot, was in that end-of-the-season state when it is most unattractive. Tomato vines were running riot, there were empty bean poles, and tall shoots of lettuce straggling to seed. A general air of hopeless neglect hung over it all. The trees soaked with rain looked black against a dull gray, gloomy sky.

Pen dearly loved a real storm, for one of her greatest joys was to go down to the shore and find the ocean covered with wild rolling breakers. The Atkinsons, Pen's uncle and aunt, with whom she had made her home since she was a baby, lived on the outskirts of Megamoc, a little village on the Maine coast. From their house a delightful short cut led to the ocean, by way of orchard, meadow and pine grove. This was Pen's favorite path, and she traveled over it almost daily. A northeasterly storm gave her special delight, and the higher the wind the more anxious she was to get down to the shore and wander along by the noisy, shouting waves with their froth of warm, white foam.

But to-day was different. It was windless,

with a steady downpour of exceedingly wet rain. Pen knew there would be no lovely curly, frolicky waves, but simply a dull cold expanse of water, beaten gray and flat by the rain. She knew that she could not take more than a few steps outside the door without becoming unpleasantly and definitely "as wet as a drowned rat"—which was her Aunt Emily's one and only way of expressing it. And Aunt Emily always objected to either of the girls going out in the rain unless it was strictly necessary, for she said it "ruined their clothes."

It was undoubtedly a depressing day, that Saturday in the middle of September. Everything contributed to make it more so, it seemed to Pen. Her meditations were interrupted by Evelyn.

"Don't wash the dishes so fast," she protested, "goodness sakes, I can't keep up with you. What's your hurry anyway? There isn't anything much to do this stupid day."

"There's plenty to do," said Aunt Emily, who had just come into the kitchen and overheard her daughter's remark, "there are the beds to change and there's Saturday baking, and there's all those tomatoes and peaches waiting to be done up. I can't peel fruit myself to-day, I've got such terrible rheumatism in my hands."

"Oh, Aunt Emily, I'm sorry the rheumatism is so bad," exclaimed Pen, looking up from the dish pan. Her sympathy was easily stirred, in spite of the fact that she could not help knowing that Aunt Emily had many ailments which served as convenient excuses when she wanted Pen to do extra work.

"I guess Evelyn will have to help with the tomatoes and peaches though," went on Pen, "there are such a lot."

"Oh, I *can't*. I just hate messing with fruit. It ruins your hands," cried Evelyn angrily, banging down the dishes she was putting away in the kitchen closet.

"Well, I don't know as I like to have you spoiling your hands either," agreed Aunt Emily, "specially since you're beginning your music lessons from that Trimville teacher next week."

At this Pen set her teeth and a rather grim expression spread over her fifteen-year-old face. It always seemed to happen that way, she thought rebelliously. When there was any hard or unpleasant work, Evelyn never failed to get out of doing it. Aunt Emily simply spoiled her. And as for Aunt Emily's rheumatism, reflected Pen, her recent sympathy evaporating entirely, it had not been so bad that she hadn't been able to knit that very morning on

the new sweater Evelyn was so anxious to wear to school on Monday.

"You needn't make the beds, Pen," went on Mrs. Atkinson, "Evelyn can do that instead, and clean up the bathroom, too."

Pen said nothing to this generous offer. It was hardly her idea of a fair exchange or an equal sharing of the household duties. It would take Evelyn, at the most, not more than three-quarters of an hour to do what Mrs. Atkinson had mapped out for her. And Pen knew very well that without help the preserving and canning would easily keep her in the kitchen all morning and afternoon.

At her continued silence, Mrs. Atkinson said sharply, "Now, don't sulk, Pen. It's raining hard and probably will be all day, and you couldn't go out without getting as wet as a drowned rat. You might as well be doing something useful while you're in the house. Goodness knows you were out enough of the time during the summer, running around with those Forresters. I'm glad they've gone back to New York. And now that school's begun, it's about all I can do to get along, there's so much work in this house. If I don't get a little help from you girls Saturdays and Sundays, I don't know what'll happen."

Pen had heard this same kind of thing so

often from Aunt Emily's lips that she might have been hardened to it. But in spite of the fact that she had heard it often, she was still stung by the injustice. She did not answer back, however, for she knew also the hopelessness of trying to better matters that way. It would have seemed a flimsy argument indeed to Aunt Emily, had Pen suggested that a rainy afternoon offered a happy spare time in which to work at her drawing. Drawing was Pen's most beloved occupation, and it was her hope some day to study art seriously.

It was hard to understand why Evelyn's music should have been more important than Pen's art, especially since Evelyn had no talent whatever. But Aunt Emily, while she could not help realizing that Pen had inherited from her artist father an unusual gift for sketching and drawing, refused to take it seriously. Paul Poindexter had died before attaining fame and fortune, and Aunt Emily certainly had no idea of encouraging Pen to believe that she was destined for greater glory.

Bracing her lips to hide their involuntary quiver, Pen set about her work in silence, until Aunt Emily and Evelyn left the kitchen.

As she sat endlessly peeling peaches that afternoon, she thought she had never been so lonely and blue. The drab water-soaked gar-

den and the rain streaming down the window pane matched her mood exactly.

“Oh, I *do* miss the Forresters so, and Dexter Alan,” she thought forlornly, “I don’t see how I can stand a whole winter here with Aunt Emily and Evelyn being so disagreeable all the time. If Uncle Lije weren’t such a dear. But even he——!”

Mr. Atkinson kept a combination grocery, paint and varnish store in Megamoc, a business which seemed to require a great deal of his time and attention. Pen felt sure that the real reason for it was that he was more comfortable and happy in the freedom of his dusty, cluttered old store than at home where he could not escape from Mrs. Atkinson’s nagging and her constant complaining about her health. He was a kindly man, though not a particularly strong character. His method of dealing with unpleasant situations was to let them alone, argue as little as absolutely necessary, and keep away as much as possible. Pen was fond of Uncle Lije. She sympathized with his dislike of quarreling and discord, for she herself would concede almost anything to avoid a scene. But she thought it was too bad he didn’t assert himself more instead of letting his family rule him. And more than anything, she envied him the possession of a refuge to

which she could escape from the Atkinson household. Keeping the store open evenings was Uncle Lije's only act of rebellion against his wife's domination.

Toward the end of the afternoon Evelyn sauntered in to the kitchen again and perched herself on the edge of the table. Pen gave one glance at her clean, immaculate hands, and then went on peeling peaches, her own fingers parboiled and stiff from handling the ripe, juicy fruit.

Evelyn Atkinson was a pretty girl, within a year of Pen's own age, but her face in repose showed the signs of wilful selfishness which her bringing up had encouraged instead of checking. Like Pen, she was also a blonde, though they were as unlike in appearance as two girls could be. Evelyn's hair, a dull lifeless, ashen color, was not naturally curly, but she wore it always elaborately frizzed. It seemed that Aunt Emily's rheumatism did not prevent her from wielding a curling iron. Evelyn's eyes were a peculiar greenish-gray while her features were regular and well-shaped.

Pen, on the other hand, had hair of bright, burnished-gold loveliness with soft natural waves. Her eyes were large and a very deep blue—"the color of the ocean on a north-

west wind day," Daphne Forrester had said. Her features were not so strictly perfect as Evelyn's, but her whole face, with its sensitive mouth and somewhat wistful, questioning eyes, expressed a natural sweetness of temper that gave her the charm entirely lacking in Evelyn's personality. Though Pen could lay claim to more actual beauty, she was shorter, much quieter and more retiring in every way than Evelyn. This, together with the fact that Aunt Emily could not see her way to dressing Pen as expensively as she did her own daughter, resulted in Evelyn being reckoned by most people the more attractive of the two girls. Certainly Evelyn always claimed more attention.

"Gee, I wish dad would put in a telephone," yawned Evelyn, stretching precariously on the edge of the table, "then at least I could talk to somebody on a horrid day like this. But say, Pen, Rhoda Martin stopped here a minute a little while ago. She'd just been downtown doing errands and she heard some news that will interest you, I guess."

"Well, tell me," said Pen, looking up expectantly as Evelyn paused, "what was it?"

"She heard that they're not going to send that new drawing teacher over from Trimville after all—'cause she's not coming to Trimville

either. She's got a scholarship or something, and she is going away to study. New York or somewhere. Guess you're sorry, aren't you?"

"I certainly am," said Pen emphatically. The thought of Miss Elwood's coming to give a drawing lesson in Megamoc every week or two, had been almost the only bright spot she could see for that long winter, bereft of the Forresters' and Dexter Alan's cheering presence. It was a blow to find that even this consolation had been taken away. There had never been a really good drawing teacher in Megamoc, and Pen, starting her second year of High School, had despaired of getting any real help until she should be able to go away somewhere for definite study of art.

"They're going to have Miss Effie Bell, again," giggled Evelyn. "Won't the boys tease the life out of her though?"

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Pen. But the vision of Miss Effie, so old-fashioned and so ineffectual, made her smile nevertheless. "Oh dear, poor Miss Effie! If she'd only be a little more up-to-date! She thinks art is just—just spatter work and fancy calendars with pink roses and gilt vines painted on them."

"Well, thank goodness, I haven't any talent for drawing," said Evelyn, "I wish they'd get a good dancing teacher in Megamoc! That's

what I'd like best." She flounced down off the table and went out, leaving Pen with the end of her preserving not yet in sight.

Evelyn's news about the drawing teacher was the last straw. Thinking it over, Pen came to the conclusion that the way everything had conspired to make it into a gloomy day was really almost funny. Actually, not a single pleasant thing had happened.

"Well," she decided suddenly, "this is going to be the last all-gloomy day! To-day can be just as horrid as it wants to. After this, there's going to be at least one pleasant thing every single day. I'll make it happen myself if I can't get it any other way." She got up and set about filling her jars, working rapidly and unhesitatingly, for she had helped with this part of the housework for at least six or seven years.

It had been a wonderful summer for Pen, and one could hardly blame her for feeling lonely and forlorn now. The Forresters, a large, jolly family spending the summer in the old, remodeled Forrester homestead, had taken Pen into their midst and given her the first really happy times she had ever known. Ingham Forrester and his dog, Felix, in particular had been her staunch friends.

Then there had been Dexter Alan. Long

before the Forresters came to Megamoc, Pen used to go out to the Malloys' farm, two miles from the Atkinsons', to call on the young ex-service man who had received a bad injury to his back in the World War.

To help him, she had learned to typewrite and had spent many hours copying the story which was to have won him fame and fortune in the form of a prize in a literary competition. Things had looked very dark for a while when the story was sent back without the prize. And then miraculously had come the Forresters' uncle, Terence Clayton, a publisher. He had read the story and liked it so much that he had carried Dexter off to New York to live with him and get the expert medical treatment which was, they hoped, to cure him and enable him to walk again.

Dexter's natural anxiety to get well was heightened, Pen suspected, by his admiration for Daphne Forrester. But Pen's sympathies were entirely with him in this, for from the first moment she saw her, Pen had thought Daphne the most beautiful girl in the world. Not only beautiful, but accomplished as well. She could swim, dive, ride horseback, drive a car, and even run a typewriter. Pen had special cause to be grateful for this final accomplishment. She would never forget how

Daphne had come to her rescue and typed the last pages of Dexter's story just when it seemed as if all hope of its getting in on time were lost! Pen had burned her hand and had had to give up at the last minute, for every touch of the keys was agony. All their hard work during the summer would have been lost but for Daphne.

And now these delightful friends were all away in New York for the winter. Of course, they would write to her, Dexter and Ingham at least. The days their letters came, Pen reflected happily, it certainly wouldn't be necessary to make anything else pleasant happen. And when things seemed more than usually discouraging, Pen could always call to mind Dexter's words, the day he told her the good news that he was going to New York to live in Uncle Terry's big house:

"Sammie, I owe every blessed bit of my good fortune to you, and I want you to know right here and now that you're going to have your share of whatever comes to me from now on. You're going to have your art education, too. We may have to wait a bit but don't lose faith in me, Sammie. It's coming sure!"

And later he had said, "I'm going to work like mad, Sammie, and next winter *you'll* be

in New York too. Can you stand just one more year here, Sammie?"

With that glorious prospect ahead of her, what did it matter how querulous and unfair Aunt Emily was? Evelyn's spite, to be sure, was just a little harder to bear. Evelyn had not been interested in going to call on any "poky old lame man" two miles out in the country, and it was hard for her to accept cheerfully the fact that Pen's friendship for Dexter was to be rewarded by such a wonderful future as the prospective move to New York. Moreover, Evelyn had been unsuccessful in her endeavor to stand in with the wealthy Forresters. That they had preferred Pen and had taken her up so cordially was something for which Evelyn could not forgive her. And like all small-natured persons she vented her disappointment and chagrin in countless little meannesses. Pen understood what was back of it all, and she tried her best to keep out of Evelyn's path and to avoid as much unpleasantness as possible.

Even when they were little girls, they had not played together much. As they grew older, they became even less congenial, and seldom had friends in common. Pen, to be sure, had few friends at best. More and more of the housework fell to her lot, for Aunt Emily

gave her to understand that she was expected not only to earn her present board, but to make up as well as she could, for all the years her uncle and aunt had sheltered her while she was growing up. Garden work, even though Pen liked it much better than housekeeping, absorbed a great deal of her spare time also.

Pen had indeed one "best friend," Janet Brown. But Janet lived on the other side of Megamoc, and Pen seldom had a chance during the week to see her outside of school hours. Janet had been away during the summer, visiting at her grandfather's farm, and had missed all the excitement which the Forrester family stirred up in Megamoc.

The thought of Janet comforted Pen now. Even if the Forresters and Dexter Alan were gone, there was still Janet to help make the winter bearable. And even if Janet wasn't interested in drawing, she was sweet and sympathetic and understanding. She loved the ocean almost as much as Pen did and she was always ready for a long walk into the country to explore for new places. She and Pen had found a number of delightful spots and given them make-believe names of their own. The fact that this was a deep secret between them only added to the fun.

Now that the garden would no longer need

attention, although there were still leaves to be raked and a kind of New England final tidying up to see to before the coming of winter, Pen hoped to have more afternoons free in which she and Janet might go for their mildly adventurous walks again. She had a great deal to tell Janet about the Forresters and Dexter Alan—it promised to be an inexhaustible subject of conversation, for Janet was deeply interested and a very satisfactory listener.

At the end of that rainy Saturday, Pen found it was cheering to look forward to seeing Janet on Monday. If Aunt Emily and Evelyn went to Trimville after school, Pen might have the afternoon to herself. Since many of its pupils came from several miles out in the surrounding country, the Megamoc High School held but one session. It began at eight-thirty and ended at one-thirty, with a short recess just before twelve o'clock.

Pen knew that she could not plan to go anywhere Tuesday afternoon, for she always finished up at that time all the family ironing left by Norah Cafferty who did the washing and as much of the ironing as she had time for before noon.

Monday, Pen decided, would be a splendid

time for them to revisit a favorite spot of theirs—the “Golden Orchard.” Her spirits rose at the prospect of the lovely walk through “Lingering Lane” and the “Fearful Forest.”

CHAPTER II

PEN LOSES A FRIEND

HAPPENING to glance up during the Latin recitation which came just before recess on Monday morning, Pen caught Janet's gaze fixed on her. There was a strange expression on her freckled little face which puzzled Pen. She appeared excited as if she knew of something interesting about to happen; and at the same time she had a sorrowful look, and Pen thought there were tears in her round, brown eyes. Meeting Pen's glance, Janet turned red and dropped her eyes quickly.

Pen had almost forgotten the incident until recess when she and Janet took their sandwiches to a quiet corner of the little park across the street from the school.

"Oh, Janet, isn't this a gorgeous day!" she exclaimed, sinking down on the grass and opening her package of lunch hungrily. "Let's go out to the Golden Orchard. It's just the kind of a day for it, and we haven't been this fall. Can you?"

"Oh dear, I wish I could but——" Janet paused.

“But why not?” urged Pen. “Why do you look so queer, Janet? Has anything happened?”

“Well, I didn’t want to tell you—till the last minute. I just can’t bear to think of it,” answered Janet, speaking very fast and looking exceedingly unhappy, “but—we’re leaving Megamoc. We’re going to move to Trimville this very week.”

“Oh, Janet, not *really*? Oh dear, what’ll I ever do without you? I was just looking forward to having you. Why are you going to Trimville?”

“Because papa’s had a chance to get just the house he wants there, and he’s always wanted us to live there so he wouldn’t have to ride back and forth on the trolley every day. And I’ve got to stay home to-day and to-morrow afternoon and help pack.”

“Well, I certainly am—am flabbergasted,” said Pen wretchedly, after they had sat in silence for a moment or two.

“I didn’t want to tell anybody till the last minute,” said Janet mournfully. “Oh, dear, Pen, I just hate to go. I like Megamoc so much better than Trimville and I—I know there won’t be anybody as nice as you. Mama says you’ll have to come over to see us. Come Saturday

and stay over night. That will be fun anyway, won't it?"

"Yes," said Pen, "except that Aunt Emily probably won't let me. There's a lot of work Saturday and Sunday, and she thinks I was out too much 'gadding' with the Forresters this summer."

"Well, she'll have to let you sometimes," cried Janet angrily. "She's a horrid woman anyway. I can't stand her. You *must* come, Pen."

"Of course, I'll try to, and maybe she'll let me," answered Pen hopefully. "If only I could invite *you* for the week-end, Janet! But Aunt Emily would have a fit. Even Evelyn hasn't much company. Just wait till I get a home of my own, I'm going to entertain all I want to. It's going to be like the Forresters' where you can ask people to meals the last minute whenever you want, and they never feel that they're putting any one out and being treated like company."

"Oh, there's the bell," cried Janet, scrambling to her feet.

Pen got up more slowly.

"Bother the bell," she said, making up a face, "I hate to go back anyway. I've got drawing fifth period, and Miss Effie Bell! Oh, Jan, how I want a good drawing teacher. I need one so!"

"Well, it's a shame," said Janet sympathetically, "but even Trimville isn't going to have Miss Elwood after all. And sometime you're going away to study where there are wonderful real artists. Just think of that."

Pen squeezed Janet's arm as they hurried back to the schoolhouse.

"You're a dear, Jan, and I'm terribly disappointed about your going away. I'm going to miss you awfully."

.

"Well," mused Pen that afternoon, "I must say I haven't found my one pleasant thing to-day—not yet anyhow. I was just counting on having Janet this afternoon, and now that's all off. And no Janet all winter—no Janet, no Ingham and Felix, no any Forresters at all and—and no Dexter!"

She sighed heavily and swallowed the lump that hurt her throat. She was sitting on the back steps in the warm September sunshine wondering what to do with herself. Aunt Emily and Evelyn had gone to Trimville according to their plans, and Pen had the afternoon free. But the news of Janet's coming departure filled her with dismay. It seemed to take away the one last prop she had been counting on to help her through the winter.

She looked over the garden disconsolately.

Of course, she could spend her afternoon at work there, there was plenty to do. But in her present mood, she wanted to get away and see something different. She had been kept rather closely at home for more than a week, and she longed for new scenes to take her mind off her loneliness.

There were several other ways to spend the afternoon. She could go down to her "rock studio" on the shore. It was quite warm enough to sit there and practise her drawing. Soon the days would be cold and the dark close in early, and then her drawing would have to be done in the house, which was not nearly so much fun. But the drawing lesson with Miss Effie Bell had filled Pen with temporary discouragement. She seemed to have lost her inspiration. She longed for Dexter's criticism which always helped her so much because it was intelligent as well as sympathetic. Fussy little Miss Bell with her pale water colors and her spatterwork simply irritated Pen.

Or she might walk out to Mrs. Malloy's and talk about Dexter. But she decided that she would wait until Tuesday or Wednesday when she would have Dexter's weekly letter from New York to take with her. Dexter had said before he left, "Sammie, if I send messages to Mr. and Mrs. Malloy by you, will you deliver

them sometimes? You know, Sammie, I'm going to the city to earn my living—and *your* art education, don't forget!—by writing. And believe me, I'll have to write a lot if I'm going to make good. With this business of having a broken back treated, you know I'm not going to be able to do more than just so much. I can't write as many letters as I want to, Sammie. Will you be a dear and share some of mine with Mrs. Malloy, who's been God's own angel of kindness to me?"

Of course Pen had promised, though she knew she would hate going out to the Malloy farm and not find Dexter there, lying on his couch on the side porch with Tim, the big Saint Bernard, guarding him. So she postponed that trip for later in the week.

"I know what I'll do," she decided suddenly. "I'll go out to the Golden Orchard alone. If I can't have Janet, I can't have her, so I might as well get used to it."

She jumped up, locked the door and put the key under the mat, and in a few minutes was down through the orchard and up by her usual short cut to Blackberry Street. So far, it was the same route she would take to go to the Malloys', but half a mile before she reached the farm she turned off the road to the left.

It was a winding sort of cow lane which she

took now, with faint traces of wagon ruts in its weedy grass. This was "Lingering Lane"—Pen did not even know its real name. Apple trees arched unevenly overhead, and all along the stone walls grew woodbine with inky-blue berries and clusters of dull crimson leaves. The autumn colors were coming on in full force, and there seemed to be a greater variety of crimsons and yellows than Pen had ever seen. Her fingers itched for a box of paints.

"I'd like to try landscapes in water colors sometime," she thought longingly, as she came to a specially bright and flaming little maple tree, "but Dexter thinks doing people will be my best work. Well, I guess I'd rather do them."

By the time the lane had made several twists, Pen had passed quite out of sight of Blackberry Street. But now, having run straight into the side of a dense little wood, the lane apparently did not have the energy or curiosity to penetrate into it, and so it turned off sharply to the left and continued on its rambling way.

Pen, however, climbed the stone wall and followed a little path into the heart of the woods. It was very still and lonely and even slightly dark there. Every time Pen came she felt as though the wood were trying to impress her



"IT WAS PEN WHO HAD GIVEN THIS BIT OF WOODLAND . . . ITS NAME OF
'THE FEARFUL FOREST.'"

with its vast size and its rough wilderness. It seemed to suggest that only by a very great effort had any path been possible, and that stray travelers had better keep to the road if they wished to pass safely through the dangers that lurked in its depths. On account of the dense underbrush and the many fallen trees and limbs scattered about, it was really difficult to make one's way anywhere except along the path.

It was a wandering little path, but Pen knew that it would very surely bring her to her destination on the other side of the wood, for after all, it was not an immense wilderness by any manner of means. It was Pen who had given this bit of woodland, which was known to those of Megamoc who knew it at all as Macintosh's Woods, its name of "The Fearful Forest."

The Fearful Forest was situated on a decided slope, and when Pen finally reached the opening, she had come down almost to the level of the distant sea. The path came to a stop against a high brick wall which stretched to either side a good hundred feet. The wood crowded up close to it, as if it were trying to push the intruder away. But the wall, old and crumbling, had been solidly built, nevertheless,

and it had no notion of allowing itself to be elbowed out of its straight, unyielding line.

Pen swung herself up one of the oak trees which grew close to the wall and quickly found a favorite perch of hers, from which she could look into and survey at her leisure the whole Juniper James estate.

CHAPTER III

THE GOLDEN ORCHARD

HERE inside the high brick walls that encircled its five acres was the Golden Orchard!

Pen and Janet had named it the Golden Orchard because there were a multitude of russet apple trees, which bore large, dull-golden fruit each autumn, dotted all over the grounds. The only trees on the whole place were spruce and pines clustered in a small dense grove around the old James house.

Pen was very fond of russet apples, but she could not imagine any one being so fond of them that he would plant nothing else in all his domain! It remained a mystery which no one seemed able to solve.

The grounds of the Juniper James place looked like an attempt to plant an orchard in a rocky pasture. Everywhere there were uneven places and big outcropping masses of rock, with vines running wild and great sprawling patches of flat juniper bushes. Pen and Janet had found blackberry vines in the corners close to the brick wall, and there were many clusters of low blueberry bushes.

"Do you suppose they built the house in the middle of the russet apple orchard," Pen and Janet used to ask each other, "or did they plant the trees around the house?"

"Think anybody'll ever live there?" Pen had wondered. "It looks as if it could be fixed up into a wonderful house."

"Too far out in the country," said Janet practically, "no good roads to get at it, and nothing but fields and marshes in front right down to the shore, and woods in back. It's a terribly lonely place."

"Yes, perhaps it is," agreed Pen doubtfully. But there was something about the very loneliness of it that appealed to her. With lovely things inside it—books and beautiful pictures and furniture and lights and open fires—furnishings like those in the Forresters' home, one could be wonderfully comfortable and happy, she thought, no matter how far out in the country it was.

The house, an old brick building which had been empty for nearly thirty years, was more than two hundred years old, it was said. Pen and Janet, of course, had never seen it when it was occupied. They had tried in vain to get a peek inside but never successfully, for the doors and windows were always tightly boarded up. It looked interesting, that old

house, but an air of slightly gloomy mystery hung over it. The shadowy grove of trees surrounded it with a dense protecting barrier.

It was large, with wings on either side, and in her imagination, Pen had planned out the inside, accounting for every bit of space and furnishing it to suit her own fancy. She and Janet had decided that it *must* contain a secret staircase. It was hard to give this staircase a satisfactory location, however. Pen thought it should lie between the walls of two rooms, while Janet insisted that it would be concealed in the chimney in some way or other.

The only window not barred tightly was one facing west, high up close to the peak of the roof. But it was a tiny window, and they had not been able to see into it from any of the trees near the house. As Pen sat alone in her oak tree perch that afternoon, the sun falling in slanting rays caught this little window and sent back to her a brilliant dazzle of light. It seemed to wink at her in a mocking sort of fashion, as if to say, "Don't you wish you could see through this window? Don't you wonder what rare old treasures may be hidden out of sight and forgotten under these eaves? You can make up all the stories you want, but perhaps there is something much more romantic and exciting here than you ever dreamed of.

An old house always has a history. Strange people have lived their lives here. Wouldn't you like to know the things they said and what happened to them?"

Tired of speculating on the mystery of the house, Pen soon climbed out to the end of a strong branch which overhung the wall, and in two nimble jumps landed inside the Golden Orchard. Her first concern was to find a good apple, and with this in her hand, she made her way by a winding little path toward the back of the house.

But here a great surprise awaited her! When she rounded the last clump of ever-green trees, she found that actually the shutters were off, the back door was open and most amazing of all—there in the open space behind the house under the thick pine trees was a little girl about ten years old!

Pen stopped and stared, excited and curious. But the little girl was so absorbed in what she was doing that she never even looked up. Slowly and carefully, with little slaps of her brush, she was painting a low wooden chair with black paint. The tip of a tiny red tongue stuck out of the corner of her mouth, showing how anxiously and absorbedly she was working.

A slight feeling of disappointment came to

Pen. She had scarcely expected to find the house open, it is true, but since it was, why couldn't there have been somebody a little nearer her own age?

The child worked on, while Pen watched her, fascinated. She was a quaint-looking, thin little person with thick brown hair cut in a square bang across her forehead and hanging over her shoulders and down her back in long, heavy, old-fashioned curls. Pen could not see the color of her eyes, but she had an attractive little face, with pretty features and flushed pink cheeks. Her dress was a faded blue gingham, and all across the front of the skirt and part way round toward the back was a row of deep patch pockets. From the top of each pocket stuck out the head of a doll! There must have been at least six of these.

Pen could not help smiling at this novel arrangement. It looked as if the little girl were a devoted mother indeed, if she had her clothes made to accommodate the carrying about of her family.

Suddenly the little girl stopped painting, her tongue disappeared and she straightened up with an explosive sigh. Then she saw Pen, and her round eyes stared for a moment in deep astonishment.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "are you a neighbor?"

"Not exactly," smiled Pen, "I live in Megamoc about a mile and a half away."

"Well, Larry said we didn't have *any* neighbors, and Susan said of course we did, 'cause no matter how far away anybody is they're your neighbors, if they're the *nearest* people. Is there anybody nearer to us than you?"

"Oh yes, indeed, up on Blackberry Street there are houses, but not very near, I'm afraid."

"Well, I don't care," replied the little girl calmly, "my mother says we ought to have enough people in our own family to play with. But they're all older than me. I wish you'd been a little girl, now you're here." She spoke almost as if she considered that Pen had taken a liberty in appearing at all.

"Well, I'm sorry, I was just wishing *you* were my age, so *I* could have some one to play with," returned Pen, much amused.

The little girl stared at her appraisingly and then answered cheerfully, "Oh well, there's lots of them for *you* to play with. There's Larry and Susan and Blair."

Pen's heart beat faster. Oh, if only she could find some new friends here. If only——

"Hey, Pat," came a peremptory shout from the back door, "mother says——Oh, hullo, who's this?"

A boy about her own age, or a little older, who had come out of the house, stopped short on seeing Pen. He had blue eyes and a high forehead with short thick brown hair. His nose was short, his mouth wide and his face was brown and freckled. There was a slight resemblance in his features to the little girl, and his blue cotton shirt and gray trousers were as old and worn-looking as her dress. In his arms he carried a broom and a large rug which he flung down on the thick pine needles, an angry, disgusted expression on his face.

"How do you do?" he asked awkwardly to Pen. His slightly surly manner made her feel uncomfortable.

"She's *not* our nearest neighbor either," put in his sister, exactly as though she were contradicting somebody, "she says she comes from Meg—a something, but I don't know what her name is anyway."

"Tell her yours then," suggested the boy scornfully.

"Well, I was going to," said the little girl promptly. "My name is Matilda MacInness Graham, and this——" she pulled out a battered doll from the nearest pocket and went on rapidly, introducing each doll in turn with the most startling fluency and without a pause, "is Hyacinth Locust Tree Graham, and she

comes from Boston, and this is Lorna Doone Graham, and she comes from Scotland, and this is Victoria Elizabeth Adelaide Eugenia, she's a princess from England and has to have a lot of names and you always have to call her by all of them 'cause if you don't it hurts her feelings, and this is Galeria Gushin Graham, and I made up that name and everybody in the family says it's awful, and this is Nicholas Knickerbocker Graham, and he comes from New York and this is my other son, and his name is Lawrence Leverett Graham, and he's named for Larry because he found him and gave him to me, and that's *all* my family and *all* their names. What's *your* name?" She paused just long enough to take a fresh breath and went on, "I hope you've got a nice name. I need one for a new paper doll."

"Well," said Pen, "I hope you'll want to give her my name. It's Penelope Poindexter."

"That's lovely! I never had one like that for ever 'n ever so long. *His* name," and she pointed to her brother who was leisurely pulling the folds out of the rug and paying no more attention to them, "is Blair Montgomery Graham. And I've got some more brothers and—Oh, here's Susan!"

To Pen's delight, a girl about her own age had appeared on the scene.

“Look, Susan, here’s company,” cried Pat eagerly, “I saw her first. She’s *my* company. She’s got a lovely name. I’m going to have two paper dolls named Penelope Poindexter.” Then she turned to Pen and said, “That’s my sister and her name is Susan Graham. She hasn’t got any middle name, isn’t it awful, and dad says he doesn’t know *what* they were thinking about not to give her one and if they’d known I was coming along and was going to like names so much they’d have made a—*a neffort* to give all us child’en two middle names anyway and maybe more——”

“Pat,” interrupted Susan, “run into the house. Mother told Blair to tell you to come in.”

“Well, I couldn’t leave my company,” said Pat with dignity, but she turned and trotted obediently into the house.

Pen and Susan looked at each other and smiled. Pat certainly broke the ice effectively, and it seemed the easiest thing in the world to get acquainted after such an introduction. Pen was relieved to find that Susan’s manner did not resemble Blair’s, but was as pleasant and cordial as could be.

“Oh, I was so surprised to find some one here,” exclaimed Pen eagerly. “Every time I’ve come I’ve wished it weren’t all boarded

and shut up. It's such a lovely old house, it seems as if it should be lived in."

"Well, it'll get lived in all right with our family," laughed Susan, "it doesn't take long to make a place look lived in when we get settled. It's a lovely big house, but it needs a lot of repairs and we haven't much furniture and no money to buy any new stuff. We'll fix it up though. Mother's got it all planned out. There were a lot of old pieces of furniture left in the house, and we're going to restore them. Mother's got Pat painting chairs already. The rest of us are cleaning up and getting ready to paint the woodwork and some of the floors and things. My, but I'm tired!"

She dropped down on the soft, pine-needle-covered ground and stretched out flat on her back. She was a slender girl, a little taller than Pen. Her nose was short and her wide mouth and blue eyes resembled Blair's. Pen wondered if they were twins. Her only real beauty was her short wavy mop of red hair.

Pen sat down on the ground beside Susan, anxious to hear more about everything. She very much wanted to go inside the house. It hardly seemed possible that it was actually open at last. Where did the Grahams come from and could they have an idea of how Pen

envied them living in the Juniper James house in the midst of the Golden Orchard?

They sat in silence for a few moments watching Blair, who was carelessly sweeping the rug, a large blue and gray one.

"That's the only good rug we possess," remarked Susan frankly, "it's Chinese, and we always take it wherever we go, no matter whether anything else is saved from the wreck or not. Hurry up, Blair, mother wants you to help Larry finish cleaning the windows. He's around front now."

"All right, all right, one thing at a time, as old Don Quixote says," returned Blair, gathering up his rug carelessly. "By the way, why can't *he* help a bit, eh?"

"Well, he is helping," said Susan, "he's unpacking the books and mending the shelves and doing plenty of work. Go on in and don't worry about the rest of the family. We're no slackers, any of us."

Pen wondered what Larry was like and what Blair meant by "Don Quixote." Before she could ask any questions Susan jumped up. "Excuse me a minute, I'll get some apples to peel while we're talking," and she raced into the house. Blair followed more slowly, carrying the rug and broom with him.

"My, what a busy family!" thought Pen.

But what fun it would be to do housework with so many of them to work together! It reminded her a little of the Forresters, except that the Forresters had plenty of servants and never did any housework. The Grahams showed every sign of being in exceedingly limited circumstances.

But how did they get this house, and why? That was the interesting question.

Just as Susan came out of the door again, another boy appeared from around the corner of the house. He carried a stepladder and a pail of water, and so intently was he examining the windows that Pen had an opportunity to get a good look at him before he saw her.

The family resemblance which she had noticed in Blair and Susan and Pat was not repeated in Larry. He was evidently the odd member, as far as looks went. One difference was that Larry was much better-looking than the others. In fact, Pen decided that he was by far the handsomest boy she had ever seen. She even had to admit to herself that Ingham Forrester and Dexter Alan, who had till then ranked first in her estimate of masculine good looks, could not dispute Larry's claim to supremacy. He was tall and broad-shouldered, with reddish hair, not quite so dark as Susan's. There was more gold and less curl in it. His

regular features and beautiful, deep-set eyes, wide forehead and attractive mouth were all exquisitely formed. Larry Graham was more than just good-looking, Pen felt instinctively the first moment she saw him. He was *good*, in every sense,—in disposition and temper and heart.

“Larry,” called Susan, “look, we’ve got our first caller. Come on and say *Hullo*.”

Larry dropped his ladder and pail and came over by the simple method of turning two such swift somersaults that they took Pen’s breath away.

“Great floor for athletics. Those pine needles are as soft as mattresses,” he exclaimed, holding out his hand to Pen. “How do you do? Don’t you think it would be a good stunt to put up a horizontal bar out here and fix up a sort of outdoor gym?”

“Yes, I do,” smiled Pen, feeling that one could not help agreeing with any suggestion Larry Graham might make. What a contrast to Blair’s unpleasant manner, she thought.

“Nonsense,” exclaimed Susan decidedly, “this family doesn’t need any gymnasium. For exercise we’ve got,” and she counted them off on her fingers, “one, sweeping, two, scrubbing floors, three, making beds, four, chopping wood, five, digging up the vegetable patch, six,

raking leaves, seven, getting in all the apples, eight, pruning the apple trees——”

“Nine, cleaning windows,” interrupted Larry, “good-night, Tommy, I was thinking of a little fun when I suggested a gym. But never mind, you’ve knocked that neat little idea on the head.” He turned three somersaults back to the house, and whistling loudly and cheerfully, attacked his window-cleaning with a furious energy that amused and fascinated Pen.

Susan, peeling apples as rapidly and efficiently as Pen herself could have done, looked after her brother smiling.

“Larry is really adorable,” she said earnestly, “he does more work than the other boys put together and he’s always ready to do extra. Blair’s lazy, and you usually have to tell him things twice.”

“Did you say you still have another brother?” asked Pen, watching Larry teetering dangerously on his rickety stepladder as he scrubbed away at the old-fashioned square panes of glass.

“Yes,” answered Susan, readily. “The Graham household consists of the following. Number one, Father Graham, who started this morning working in Trimville. He has to walk to the crossing and take the quarter of eight

train every day. Number two, Gardner Graham, my oldest brother who goes with dad. He's got a position in a bank. He and dad earn the money to support the rest of us. I guess they don't earn a great deal, poor dears! Gardner's just a little over twenty years old.

"Then there's Don Quixote, only of course, that isn't his real name. He's a cousin of mother's and his name is Aldous Bailey Reeves. I don't know just why we started calling him Don Quixote. Gard did first, years ago, and now we just call him Don. Something happened to him once, some disappointment or some one deceived him. I don't know, mother never told us any more than that, and we daren't ask Don himself. Anyway, he sort of retired from the world and has been living with us and teaching us for years. We always seem to live in queer, out-in-the-country places because it's cheaper, I suppose, and we none of us, except Gard, ever went to school. Mother taught us when we were little, before Don came and since then, he's taught us everything." She paused and then asked, "Where do you go to school?"

"In Megamoc," answered Pen, "I'm in the second year High School."

"I think it would be great to go to school and know a lot of other girls and do things

with them," said Susan. "I want awfully to go to college and live in a dormitory and have spreads in my room and all sorts of fun like that."

"It would be fun," agreed Pen, "but I'd rather live in a big family with a real mother and father of my own, and my own brothers and sisters."

"Oh, haven't you any?" asked Susan, pausing to look at Pen in astonishment.

"No, only an uncle and aunt and cousin. No really my-own family," answered Pen.

"Well, that—that would seem queer," said Susan slowly, as if it had never occurred to her that everybody didn't have a father and mother. "If we didn't have so many of us, you might come and be adopted into our family. I'm sure mother and dad would love to have you."

"Why, that's sweet of you," said Pen, slightly embarrassed by this matter-of-fact suggestion. As if adopting any one were a simply, every-day affair! "I'd love to come to see you sometimes, though, if you'd let me. I feel specially lonesome for a family because I had such lovely friends this summer, a big family who were awfully good to me. But they've gone to New York for the winter and taken my best friend with them."

"Tell me about them," said Susan, "who ——" but before she could finish her question, a woman appeared at the back door.

"Oh, there's mother," exclaimed Susan and jumping up, she ran over to her. "Mother, here's our first friend in the new place. Come and meet Penelope Poindexter."

Mrs. Graham came forward and said with a smile, "Pat told me your name. She is very much impressed by it. How do you do, Miss Poindexter? Had you heard that the Graham tribe was moving into the old Juniper James place?"

"No," answered Pen, "I hadn't the least idea anybody would be here. But I've often come just to look at the house and wander around in the orchard. It's—it's always fascinated me, this place," she ended shyly.

"It's a lovely place, or could be, but it does need a lot of attention," answered Mrs. Graham. "I believe I really must sit down for a moment, girls, and make talking to you an excuse for stopping in the middle of things. I'd like a bit of a rest."

They all three sat down then, while Susan went on peeling apples. Mrs. Graham was a tall woman with a thin, tired-looking face and deep shadows under her eyes. Her strongest resemblance to the children was in her wide

mouth and square white teeth. Her hair which was dark brown and well streaked with gray, was combed straight away from her forehead and rather tightly knotted at the back of her head. Once, perhaps, she had been a pretty girl, but time and work had robbed her of it all. Pen thought of Mrs. Forrester, still so beautiful in spite of her large family of children. What a difference money could make!

Mrs. Graham wore an old gingham dress and big, worn-looking blue apron. Pen thought that even her hands which showed signs of having done housework for many years, looked tired!

As they sat there, Pen waited for Mrs. Graham to go on speaking. She herself could think of nothing to say except in the form of questions, and she shrank from seeming curious.

"I believe," said Mrs. Graham, her eyes fixed on the big house, "it's going to be one of the nicest places we ever had, if we put a little work into it. The paneling and fireplaces and stairways are really fine."

"Oh, do you suppose there's a secret staircase?" exclaimed Pen eagerly.

Mrs. Graham smiled.

"Nothing could make us all happier than to

find one. But I don't know of any yet. You'll have to come and help us hunt for it. The boys have begun already to look for a secret passage from the cellar to the shore. They insist that nobody would have built a house way out here on a lonely country shore unless he were a smuggler. Well, after all, that wouldn't be so strange, would it? Perhaps you've heard stories about this house and former owners?"

"Almost nothing," answered Pen regretfully. "They say that old Juniper James had all his connections with Scotfield and not Megamoc where I live."

"Well, the present owner is no relation of the James family, and his agent from whom we rented the place, lives in Trimville. He couldn't tell us anything except that the owner wouldn't do a thing in the way of repairs but would let us have it very cheap and we could do what we wanted or could afford to, to make it comfortable. It hasn't been lived in for a long time, but fortunately for us, the last tenant had put in a fairly good bathroom, though it is old-fashioned, of course. The floors need mending and there is a lot of papering and painting to be done."

"Mother's got the whole family divided into squads for doing everything," put in Susan smiling. "Dad and Gardner have to paper

as many rooms as we can afford to do, Blair and Larry paint woodwork and floors, Don and mother and Pat and I restore furniture and make curtains, *if* we can afford to buy material. And all of us, every day, have to spend at least an hour out of doors, trimming off the lower branches of all these thick trees so we'll get a little more light and air for the house. And we're going to clear away underbrush so it'll just be a nice, clean pine grove. Then the boys have to dig up a vegetable garden to get the ground ready for next spring, and I'm going to have a few flower-beds, too. And—let's see, what else, mother?"

"Well, with the regular housework, cooking and cleaning and mending and making clothes and chopping wood and so forth, I think we'll be pretty busy," said her mother, and she sighed a little. A worried look came to her face. Susan frowned, started to speak, and then pressed her lips together tightly. Pen noticed that she watched her mother when Mrs. Graham was not looking, and that she seemed puzzled and troubled about something.

"I'd like to help when I come, if—if I may," volunteered Pen.

"Thank you," said Mrs. Graham, "do come as often as you can. Not for the work, but

just for company. We'd be glad to have you. And now I must run in and get to work again."

"And I've got to go home, it's beginning to get late," exclaimed Pen, who had forgotten all about the time.

"Which way did you come?" asked Susan interestedly.

"From the back, through the woods. There's a path up to the lane and from there you get to Blackberry Street and that takes you right to Megamoc."

"Oh, I'm going to walk up to the back wall with you," said Susan, setting down her apples and jumping up. She gave a queer loud whistle which startled Pen, it was so sudden and unexpected. The result of the whistle surprised her, too.

Larry stopped his window-cleaning and came over in two bounds. Pat appeared rushing pell-mell from the house. Blair stuck his head out of the window.

"What's doing, Tommy?" cried Larry.

"Come on and let's all take Penelope Poin-dexter as far as the end of the grounds. She came over the west wall, and we should give her armed escort back up to there," explained Susan, who was plainly the leader.

"Right!" cried Larry. Blair sauntered out and joined them.

"You lead the way and we'll follow and protect you," commanded Susan. Pen smiled and obeyed. All four Grahams began to whistle a lively march, and they set off, single file, along the little path that wound through the Golden Orchard to the west wall.

"Come again to-morrow," said Pat, as Pen paused on top of the brick wall and turned to say a last good-bye. "I'll show you my paper dolls. I've got forty-five and they've *all* got two middle names and they're lovely dolls. Will you come to-morrow?"

"I'm sorry, but I can't possibly," said Pen, "but maybe I can later in the week."

"Well, come any time," urged Susan, "and next time we'll show you over the house. It'll be clean then even if it isn't all papered and painted and neat."

All the way home Pen carried in her mind the picture of the four Grahams standing in a row in the Golden Orchard saying good-bye to her. Little Pat with her long, thick hair, her eager smile and the row of pockets full of dolls; Susan, slender and red-haired, with energy and decision in every movement and a smile of sincere friendliness on her face; Blair, hanging back somewhat, his expression discontented and slightly contemptuous; and finally, Larry, tall and handsome, so full of

life that he couldn't stand still, but was continually dancing a jig or whistling or swinging his arms about, or doing all three at once. There they were—and just a few hours before Pen hadn't even known they existed!

Strange how people came into your life, appearing like unknown ships sailing into sight over the horizon! But how welcome they were! Janet's departure which was taking her only remaining friend had made Pen feel very forlorn and deserted. And now here she was miraculously provided with a whole new set of people.

CHAPTER IV

PEN DREAMS OF A SECRET STAIRCASE

“I WISH the Juniper James place wasn’t so far away,” thought Pen, as she turned in at the Atkinson gate. “That was the trouble with Dexter, way out at the Malloys’. It takes so long to get there, and when we begin having snow, it’ll be almost impossible. Won’t Aunt Emily and Evelyn be surprised to hear some one is living out there now?”

But Aunt Emily and Evelyn had heard the news in Trimville. Cousin Bessie Atkinson, with whom they took supper, after Evelyn’s music lesson, lived next door to the man in whose shoe factory Mr. Graham had just become bookkeeper. His wife had passed along what few details were known about the Graham family—the fact that young Graham was in the Merchants’ Bank, that the family came from somewhere outside of New York, and that they were not well off. It was annoying to find so soon that both Mr. Graham and his son were “regular clams” and had given

out no interesting details of their personal affairs and family history. This trait was not likely to make them popular in Trimville, or anywhere else.

“Good place for ’em, way out in that lonesome James house,” said Aunt Emily, “they can be as exclusive and stand-offish as they want to. No one’ll bother to go near them, I guess.”

“I don’t see how any one can want to live in a spooky old house like that, anyway,” remarked Evelyn, “a place that’s been shut up for ever and ever. Bet it’s haunted! I wouldn’t stay there after dark for anything in the world. And it’s a terrible place to go to school from. Megamoc’s the nearest, and there’s no way of getting here except walking.”

“Cousin Bessie didn’t know how many children there were,” said Aunt Emily, “perhaps there aren’t any. But I should think, with two of the family working in Trimville, they’d live there. You can get nice little houses in good repair——”

“And stores and movies, too,” interrupted Evelyn. “It’s silly to stick out in the country, buried alive. Wish dad would move to Trimville, ma. It’s so stupid in Megamoc.”

“Well, be thankful you don’t live out in the

Juniper James house," retorted her mother, "there's worse places than Megamoc. I wonder where those Grahams'll buy their provisions—they can't get any delivery down there, there's no road goes in near the house——"

Evelyn did not particularly care whether the Grahams got any provisions at all. In fact, she was inclined not to take much interest in a family with so little to recommend them. Evelyn hated long walks. The Grahams would have had to possess a great deal more wealth or romantic attraction than was yet apparent, in order to make her consider them a possible source of pleasure and entertainment.

Pen understood Evelyn well enough to know what her cousin was thinking. This was exactly what she hoped for. It was not that Pen was inclined to be selfish. She would gladly have shared all her friends and good times with Evelyn. But Evelyn wasn't a good "sharer"—she wanted always to be first and only, and when she was trying to get something, she had no consideration for anybody she thought was standing in her way. She had not succeeded in ousting Pen from the Forresters' affections, but she had caused her a great deal of unhappiness in the effort.

The Forresters had been an entirely different proposition. Their wealth, their beauti-

ful big house, their servants, automobiles, horses and dogs made them extremely desirable in Evelyn's eyes. What had a poor family like the Grahams to offer after the glamor of the New York Forresters?

Pen knew already that she herself desired the friendship of the Grahams. If Evelyn weren't interested in them, it would make it much easier. Her spirits rose a little. She had purposely said nothing, waiting for a good opening to tell about her adventure.

"Well," said Evelyn finally, "Pen'll probably find out all about them. She seems to get in with all the queer new people that come anywhere near Megamoc."

"That was just another characteristic remark of Evelyn's," thought Pen resentfully. Her first impulse was not to say anything after all—to keep her discovery a secret. But on second thought, she realized that Evelyn was bound to find out sooner or later. More unpleasantness might result than if she told them immediately. Pen had changed a little in the past five months. Before that, she had always been inclined to avoid any discussion with Evelyn and to nurse her hurt feelings when Evelyn was disagreeable. She had felt herself so alone and defenceless. All her life she had been made to realize her dependence and given

to understand that by every right, Evelyn came first, that she had no reason in the world for considering herself anything but a plain, uninteresting girl, useful to do housework but of no special value or importance in any other way. Pen had concurred meekly, with only occasional outbursts of rebellion.

But since her acquaintance with the Forresters and Dexter Alan, she had gained greatly in courage, initiative and self-confidence. She had come to realize that at least to a certain extent, she had her daily happiness in her own hands. Why, after all, should she let herself be bothered by Evelyn's spite?

And so, instead of following her first impulse, she spoke up and said, calmly, "It seems so, doesn't it? You won't be surprised, Evelyn, to hear that I've got acquainted with the Grahams already. Not Mr. Graham and the son who works in Trimville, but the rest of the family."

"Well, for the land sakes, Pen," exclaimed Aunt Emily, "have you been way out to the Juniper James place *to-day*?"

"Mercy!" ejaculated Evelyn scornfully, but she could not help being interested just the same, "when did you hear they were coming? They must have thought it funny for

you to rush out there the first thing before they hardly got in."

"I didn't know they were there," retorted Pen; "I just walked out because——because I wanted the walk, and because Janet and I used to go there for russet apples often. I think it's an interesting old place."

"Well, what are they like?" demanded Evelyn. "Might as well tell us, seeing you went."

Pen gave them a brief description of her call on the Grahams. Although she had not much fear that Evelyn would think them worth cultivating, she decided to take no unnecessary chances, and so she left out entirely, among other things, the fact that Larry was so handsome. She felt a little guilty when she saw that she had succeeded in painting a rather uninteresting picture of the Grahams and that Evelyn obviously had no intention of seeking them out.

"I wish," said Evelyn, yawning, "that some rich family, not so snippy and exclusive as the Forresters, had taken the Juniper James place and fixed it up all grand, and gave dances and week-end parties, and brought some fellows with a little pep down here. I'm sick of all these Megamoc boobs!"

"Evelyn!" exclaimed her mother, "I wish

you wouldn't use such horrid language. The way the girls talk nowadays is a scandal, I'm ashamed to——”

“Oh, forget it, ma,” interrupted Evelyn rudely, “you ought to be glad I don't talk the way some of them do. You don't know what up-to-date language is like.”

“Well, I don't want to hear anything *more* up-to-date than yours, miss, thank you,” retorted Mrs. Atkinson.

Pen slipped away to bed. During the night she had a vivid dream of the inside of the Grahams' house. It seemed to her that she heard some one crying, and that the sound came from the wall beside a big fireplace in one of the downstairs rooms. In the dream it seemed that she thought, “Oh, I must go up the secret staircase,” and that she had without hesitation pushed aside a sliding panel in the wall. In the opening was a tiny, narrow, dark staircase, leading, not up, as Pen had expected, but down. As she took the first step downward, something reached up from below and seized her ankle. She screamed with terror, and woke up, her heart beating violently and a shuddering moan on her lips.

Evelyn had hold of Pen's ankle and was shaking her.

"Wake up, Pen! Hurry and get up, you'll be late to school."

Pen blinked. It was good to be back in her own little room under the eaves, with the morning sun streaming in the open window.

"I had an awful dream," she exclaimed, jumping out of bed.

"Well, you'll have an awful scolding if you don't hurry," retorted Evelyn, disappearing down the stairs.

While she was doing the ironing that afternoon, Pen thought over her dream. It was so vivid that she felt as if she must be able to walk straight up to the sliding panel and show the Grahams where their secret staircase lay! Wouldn't it be wonderful if there actually were one just where she had dreamed it! Things like that happened sometimes, didn't they? In books at least, she reflected.

"It seems as if I couldn't wait to go again and find out. It's awfully interesting, the whole place, and I don't know why, I just feel that there's some kind of a mystery connected with it. Either to do with the house or with the Grahams. Wonder what the rest of the family are like? I hope I see them next time."

As soon as she had finished ironing, she sat down and wrote a long letter to Dexter Alan telling him all about the family who had come

to live in her Golden Orchard and about her dream of the secret staircase.

That evening Uncle Lije brought her two letters, one from Ingham Forrester and one from Dexter Alan. Ingham never wrote long letters. He stated everything in short sentences, said what he had to say and then stopped abruptly. His letter read:

“Dear Pen: News! We’ve moved out of the city to a house in Scarsdale. Mother isn’t well. She may have to have an operation later on. Anyhow she can’t do any entertaining for a while. I’m commuting to New York to school. Lucie and the twins go to school out here. Your adored Daphne is taking up literature and literary men. She writes a lot and goes to town a lot. To see Uncle Terry? I don’t think. Dexter can tell you about her. Felix likes Scarsdale and so do the other dogs. Felix wants to know if you’ll come here to spend Christmas with us? Please think about it. Every one in the family is going to write you a separate invitation. How’s everything in Megamoc? Felix is waiting for a letter from you. Every one sends love. Ingham.”

Christmas in New York with the Forresters! Pen sat for a moment absorbed in the alluring prospect. What fun! What a wonderful time

she could have there! Her eyes shone with excitement.

Christmas in the Atkinson household was not a specially thrilling holiday. There was always a big family dinner. Cousin Bessie and her husband George from Trimville, Uncle Henry and Aunt Hester from Scotfield, with their two children, all came for the day. Pen did not so greatly mind the extra work all this involved, but she never had liked Uncle Henry with his strong cigars and his grouchy manner, nor Aunt Hester, with her important, condescending manner, her silk dresses and the array of heavy, old-fashioned jewelry that adorned her ample figure. Why did they need to make it so obvious that they expected an extra display of gratitude from Pen for the gifts they gave her? Pen never felt so keenly as on Christmas that she was the "poor relation" and that the gifts of the rest of the family were in the nature of charity, from the bestowing of which they derived much virtuous satisfaction.

It would be wonderful to escape that family party. And then Pen's hopes collapsed. Where could she get the money for the trip—money for suitable clothes and for train fare? It was a long way to New York from Maine, and Uncle Lije surely couldn't give her what

seemed in her eyes the fortune necessary to take her there.

Pen sighed. There was no use looking forward to anything beautiful like Christmas in New York.

She turned eagerly to Dexter Alan's letter, which read:

"Dear Sammie: What in the name of modern art is *spatter work*? Do send me a sample. Your description of Miss Effie Bell, who is going to be your drawing teacher, fills me with a curiosity that is remarkably rampant and demands to be satisfied. Send me also a snapshot of the worthy lady—meaning one of your sketches. I must see what she looks like.

"Cheer up, it's tough luck, but just you wait till you come to New York. We'll get you a dozen different drawing teachers, one for every hour in the day. And they'll work you so hard and be so severe and exacting that you'll wish yourself back in the dear old easy days of Miss Effie Bell.

"I wish you were here now. You would love this big, quiet old house, with its high ceilings and carved woodwork and thick carpets and oil paintings and velvet hangings. Daphne Forrester teases Mr. Clayton about the house. She says it's frightfully old-fash-

ioned and formal and gloomy. But I don't think so. I like it. It's like a setting for a nice, old-fashioned, leisurely novel of the past century. It seems to me to fit Uncle Terry to a T. He's part of it—and yet, he's not old-fashioned nor out-of-date himself.

“The doctor allows me to write only two hours a day just now. I'm having massage and some special electrical treatments, and very soon I'm to go to the hospital for a couple of weeks. It'll hold up my writing but now I'm here, I'm at their mercy and Uncle Terry insists on doing everything the doctors say. They promise that I'll be so much better after Christmas that I can make up then by writing a lot more.

“Ingham came in yesterday to see me. He said they wanted you to come down for Christmas. Sammie, *do* come! I miss you, even if I'm a whole lot older than that young rascal and haven't got a Felix-dog. Don't you suppose Aunt Emily would let you? Watch for an auspicious moment and ask her. Tell her I'm going to pay your car-fare as my Christmas present. Don't forget. I shan't be able to write long letters from now till Christmas so you'll have to come then and let me talk you blind and deaf and dumb. Good-bye, Sammie,

bless you! Write and tell me all the Megamoc doings. Your old pal, Dexter."

Could she go after all? Could she possibly persuade Aunt Emily to let her go to New York? So few people in Megamoc ever went to New York! Occasional trips to Bangor or Portland or Boston were taken, but New York! It was almost as wonderful as going to Europe. "Oh no," thought Pen miserably, "she'll never let me, because of Evelyn. Evelyn would be wild—she's never been herself. And then I haven't any good clothes. Dexter wouldn't realize that. But wasn't it lovely for him to offer me all that money for the trip!"

Suddenly another side of the affair struck her. What right would she have to accept such a big present from him? He needed every cent. Pen knew that, in spite of Dexter's tiny income which had been just enough for him to live on at the Malloys', and in spite of the additional money which Uncle Terry's publishing house was giving him for his book, he was encountering heavy expenditures. Clothes for himself and doctors' bills and treatments. And what was more, Pen knew that he was hoping to make enough money by the following fall to enable her to come to New York to study art. Every bit spent now would make it so much harder for him. Pen decided

quickly. "Of course, I'm *not* going to New York. It's too expensive."

The thought of it came to her often, however, in the following weeks, and it was hard not to think of it longingly, and sometimes to wonder whether she mightn't accept after all. But it was so much easier *not* to ask Aunt Emily than to ask her, that Pen stuck to her resolution and wrote and told Dexter her decision. To him and to the Forresters she gave the excuse that she was needed at home. There were to be an extra number of relatives this year. In addition to Cousin Bessie and her husband and Uncle Henry and his family, Aunt Emily's sister and nephew from Ohio who had not been East for ten years, were coming to spend at least three weeks with the Atkinsons. Pen knew that having two extra people in the house would greatly upset Aunt Emily who seldom entertained company for more than one meal, or a day at the most. Pen knew she would undoubtedly be needed, and she knew too that Aunt Emily's nerves were going to make the sacrifice of staying doubly hard.

CHAPTER V

THE JUNIPER JAMES HOUSE

It was Saturday before Pen was able to get away long enough to think of walking out to the Grahams. Ironing, garden work, studying and rainy weather had all kept her at home. After the Saturday morning baking was done, dinner over and the kitchen cleaned up, Pen was finally free. Evelyn had gone off with Rhoda to attend the first school football game of the season. Pen, hurriedly pulling on her sweater—she never wore a hat until the weather got much colder—hoped fervently that she could get away before Aunt Emily found some excuse for preventing her.

“Pen,” exclaimed Mrs. Atkinson, just as Pen opened the front door, “stop at the library and ask Miss Buffum if she’s got that new book she told me about. I’d like it over Sunday.”

“I—I wasn’t going down town,” answered Pen hesitatingly.

“Well, is there anything to prevent you?”

I didn't know you had an engagement," said Mrs. Atkinson.

Pen gathered up her courage.

"I'm going for a walk out in the country," she answered, "but I'll stop at the library before I come home." She walked out of the house and shut the door hastily.

It was a cold day with a cloudy sky which made Pen think of snowstorms and the coming of winter. Leaves were beginning to fall rapidly, and everywhere one walked were brown drifts of them to scuff through to the accompaniment of a pleasant rattle and rustle. The Fearful Forest was losing its dense, gloomy shade also, and the little trail through it was deep with its shedding leaves. Pen's excitement grew with each step that brought her nearer to the Golden Orchard. To-day surely she would be taken inside the house—this raw, biting air with its hint of threatening rain was quite different from the bright, warm sunshine of the previous Monday. They could not sit out in comfort to-day on the pine-needled ground behind the house. The fog was blowing up also, and as Pen paused for a moment on the top of the wall, she noticed that a soft gray mist hung over the grove and that she could scarcely see even the one little west window.

Climbing hastily down, she hurried through the orchard toward the house. None of the Grahams were in sight, but Pen's observant eyes noticed signs of their industry in the neat piles of brush stacked up in several places and in the patches of freshly dug-up ground plainly intended for next year's vegetable garden. Close to the house, many of the pine and spruce trees had already been trimmed and a great deal of underbrush cleared away.

She stood for a minute looking up at the big brick house, undecided whether to knock at the back door or to go around to the front. At that moment the door opened, and she heard Blair's voice exclaiming defiantly, "I'll do it when I get good and ready." He slammed the door with terrific force and dashed off around the corner of the house without even seeing her.

"Gracious," murmured Pen, "wonder what's the matter with him? Seems to be in the same bad temper. Now I don't know what to do—"

But just then, she heard a rap on the window and looking up, saw Susan Graham waving and beckoning. She disappeared and a moment later the door opened and there was Susan saying, "Oh, I'm so glad you've come. I've

been hoping you would, every day this week. Come on in."

The door opened into a small back room and from there they entered a large, old-fashioned kitchen. Before Pen could do more than realize how good the warmth from the kitchen stove felt after her long walk, Susan had led her into the front hall. This was surprisingly big, with a clean bare floor and gloomy old paper on the walls. Broad stairs with beautiful colonial banisters led to a landing half way up. Pen got a glimpse of a tall, many-paned window with fan-shaped top, and then they were at the living room door.

"The hall's chilly to-day," said Susan, "but we've got a grand open fire in the living room."

"What a lovely big room!" murmured Pen, hesitating shyly at the door. Apparently all the Grahams were gathered together there and at first glance, there seemed to be a great many people in the room.

"Now you can meet the rest of the family," said Susan cheerfully. After Pen had spoken to Mrs. Graham, who sat sewing close to one of the deep side windows, and had smiled at Larry and Pat, she was introduced first to Mr. Graham, then to Mr. Reeves and finally to Gardner.

Her first impressions, while she was still too

overwhelmed by meeting all these strangers to look at them closely, were that Mr. Graham was a tall, quiet man with gray hair, spectacles and a dreamy, detached air; that Mr. Reeves, who was much younger than she had expected, wore a startling tie of bright green, orange and blue and had a most attractive twinkle in his gray eyes; and that Gardner, whose hair was exactly the color of Susan's, had somber, unhappy eyes, but a pleasant smile. Later, of course, she noticed many other things about each of them, but there was one which puzzled her from the first day. That was, why should Mr. Reeves, who had some kind of great sorrow or disappointment in his life, wear such a serene, contented look, while Gardner, who was young and presumably untouched, had a plainly unhappy expression?

The Grahams were all in extremely shabby, working clothes and seemed to have paused only a moment from their various occupations.

"This is a clan meeting," explained Susan. "We were about to go upstairs and admire the job of papering the Cupboard Room that daddy and Gard have just finished. Come along, everybody, we can show Penelope too."

"This room's been painted since we moved," went on Susan, "and so have the parlor and dining room and kitchen. Larry's worked aw-

fully hard, and dad and Gard worked evenings papering this room and the dining room. They began the Cupboard Room last night and just got it done this afternoon. It's a lovely room."

"Why do you call it the Cupboard Room?" asked Pen, as they all trooped upstairs and into the room over the one they had just left.

"Look at the cupboards in it," explained Susan. "Did you ever see one room with so many? Look, there's one on each side of the chimney in the alcoves, one in the corner of the room, one on each side of this door, and one down low here in the paneling. And see up there, isn't that a funny place for a cupboard?"

There were three doors in the room, two from the hall, and one leading to a room in the back. Over this third exit, high up in the wall, was a small square wooden door.

"How does that paper look, mother?" asked Mr. Graham.

His quiet voice sounded a little tired, Pen thought.

"Why, it's wonderful," answered his wife, who carried a sock in one hand and a threaded needle in the other, "I'm more than pleased. This plain yellow is just the thing to brighten up a north room."

"Well, all the rooms are rather dark on ac-

count of the trees being so close," remarked Susan, in her practical, matter-of-fact way, "but this is going to be sweet, mother. I'd like nice, cheerful flowered cretonne curtains. This is mother's room," she explained to Pen, "and we're using force to put the best pieces of bedroom furniture in here. See this lovely old four-poster that was in here already! I've been rubbing it up to make it shine. And this big old wing chair will look grand after it's covered with something nice."

"It will be a lovely room," said Mrs. Graham earnestly, "but the rest of you won't have a thing except beds, I'm afraid. It's not right, children——"

"It's just exactly right," retorted Susan firmly, "and you can't do anything about it now. You've never had a pretty room since I can remember and the rest of us don't need them. We spend all our daytimes downstairs in the living room and schoolroom, or the dining room and kitchen, and outdoors. What do we need bedrooms for except to sleep in?"

"Well, perhaps," agreed Mrs. Graham, reluctantly, "at any rate I do believe we'd better try to fix up downstairs first so we can have a pleasant place to live in this cold winter." Then she went on, "Dears, daddy and Gard, clean up this mess now and move the furniture

back into place and then come downstairs and rest. You've done enough for one day. Pat, run along to the kitchen and look at the beans for mother. I think it's time they had some more water. Aldous, will you *please* try to find that cook book of mine? I am sorry, but it's probably packed at the very bottom of the last box you haven't opened. Larry dear, let me see how you're getting on with painting the bathroom. Do you think one coat will be enough?"

Pen and Susan, the only ones not disposed of by Mrs. Graham's rapid directions, started to inspect the rest of the house for Pen's benefit. There were four rooms in the main part of the house on that floor and one large one in the right wing and two smaller ones in the other wing.

"Gard and Larry sleep here," said Susan, showing Pen the front room opposite her mother's, "and this is mine back of it. Pat sleeps in the room off of mother's, and Blair has one of the small rooms in the left wing. See, you have to go down two steps. Isn't it fun?"

She led Pen through a door at the rear of the main hall, and down two wide, shallow steps into a narrow corridor. The first door

opened into Blair's room, a square little place with nothing in it except a narrow cot bed.

"There's one just like it next to it," went on Susan, "and here are back stairs, going down into the lovely paneled room we're going to use for a library next summer. This staircase goes up to the attic too. Nothing much in *any* of our rooms yet," she continued, with the frankness so characteristic of her, which Pen found very attractive, "except beds and some kind of bureau or chest of drawers. But before the winter's over, I know we'll get quite a bit more. You see, there is really a lot of old, broken furniture up in the attic, and we're all fairly good at mending and restoring it. We've had to do it all our lives to make places fit to live in. Later I'll show you just what I've planned for my own room. I don't much care whether I have anything during the winter, but in the summer I do like pretty bedrooms, and it's nice to have a place of your own. This is the biggest house we've ever lived in. Usually I have to share a room with Pat."

She brought Pen back again to the front hall and after hesitating a moment said, "Oh yes, there's Don's room. He's downstairs so I can give you a peek in. It's in the right wing, this way." At the rear of the hall, she opened a

door to the right, and they went down two steps again into a short corridor which turned at right angles toward the west. Susan opened the first door just around the corner.

"Oh, what—what an—an interesting room!" said Pen. She really thought it very queer and bare and hardly knew what to say, for she did not want to be impolite.

Mr. Reeves' room was a very large, long one, with six windows and a low ceiling. There was no bed in it, only a canvas hammock slung across a corner. A large table stood in one end of the room with a straight chair in front of it. The chair faced the two north windows from which one had just a glimpse through a gap in the pine trees of a lonely shore and gray ocean beyond. The only other furnishings in the entire room were a plain chest of drawers painted black, a small shelf of books hung on the wall and a wooden chest standing on the floor under one of the west windows.

A picture over the black bureau caught Pen's attention immediately. In the big, bare room which let in through its many uncurtained windows the dull gray sky, somber pine trees and cold subdued, fog-laden outdoors, the contrast of the vividly-colored picture was almost startling. It showed a strip of tropic beach, deep blue sky, deeper blue water, yel-

low sand and just a hint of green palm trees in the distance. Close up in the foreground lay the figure of a girl, basking in the hot sunshine. She wore a thin, white dress of some sort, but her arms and beautifully-shaped legs were bare. The warmth and light were dazzling—one could almost see the shimmer that quivers over sand on a glaring hot day!

“That’s a wonderful picture!” exclaimed Pen fascinated. It seemed to her that she would feel actual warmth from the painting if she went close to it.

“Yes,” answered Susan indifferently, “Don carries it around everywhere with him, and always puts it up first thing.”

“Was he a sailor?” asked Pen, as she reluctantly followed Susan back to the front hall, “Does he really sleep in that hammock?”

“Yes, he sleeps in it, always has. He did make a voyage round the world once years ago, I think.”

The house was full of shadowy corners on that dull afternoon, and Pen, still acutely aware of the fact that she was actually in the Juniper James house at last, felt a thrill of excitement with every step she took. Every bit of it was fascinating to her, although she was continually tempted to spin around suddenly to see if some one had not crept up be-

hind her or stepped out from a secret cupboard in the wall.

"Let's just run up to the attic a minute," said Susan, "and then we'll go down and get warmed up by the fire."

The attic was not very different from many attics Pen had seen in other old New England houses. There were a few small windows, sloping walls with bunches of old, forgotten herbs and ears of corn hanging from the rafters, a confused mass of furniture, trunks and boxes, and all the usual attic paraphernalia.

But Pen could see, all around the edges, dark places running way back under the eaves. Who knew where they led to and what mysteries were concealed in their dusky shadows?

"Sort of dark here to-day," remarked Susan, "but isn't it a lovely big attic? First chance I get I'm going to explore everything and see what's up here. We've been so busy I couldn't."

"Oh, I'm sure you'll find something awfully thrilling," exclaimed Pen, shivering a little from cold and excitement.

"Well, I wish I could find some nice stuff for curtains," answered Susan, as they hurried downstairs again, "and maybe some old-fashioned china or quaint things that we could use to help furnish up the house."

Pen laughed. Susan laughed too, good-naturedly.

"I'm not very romantic, am I? I'm the practical one of the family, I guess. The rest of them expect to find at the very least a sea chest full of Spanish gold or——"

"Or a nice big trunk full of headless skeletons and dried scalps," put in Larry.

They had entered the living room as Susan was talking and found assembled there nearly the complete number of Grahams.

"I'd rather have a cooky full of raisins," remarked Mr. Graham mildly, from his chair beside the fireplace. He held a book in his hands, and there were several piled on the floor beside him.

Pat, who had been sitting on the rug at his feet, jumped up.

"Let me get them, Susan?"

"Of course, Pats."

"Bring in a lot," added Larry.

"Sit down here, Pen," said Susan, pulling a chair closer to the fire, "and look around all you want to. Maybe you can suggest things to help fix up the house."

"It looks lovely the way it is," said Pen honestly, but she gladly availed herself of the permission. It was a disappointment to find that the fireplace and paneling did not look at

all like the one in her dream. Of course, one couldn't expect a dream to come true. She tried to think she really hadn't, but still—it would have been such fun to have startled all the Grahams by walking over and opening up a hidden door in their wall and showing them an unexpected secret staircase!

"This is the nicest room downstairs," remarked Susan, also gazing about. Pen's hopes went up again suddenly. Her dream might have taken place in one of the other rooms just as well.

"We get the western sun all afternoon and—I don't know, there are some rooms you just know are meant to be lived in," went on Susan, "the room across the hall is just gloomy."

"It was obviously the best parlor in its day," remarked Mr. Graham, "and opened only for funerals and weddings and such state occasions. It's quite plainly in the atmosphere. Every room has its own personality, you know. Oh—here come our refreshments."

Pat, carefully carrying a big plate piled with molasses cookies came into the room at that moment, and there was a general movement of drawing up closer to the fireplace. Mr. Reeves sat opposite Mr. Graham at the other corner of the hearth and seemed to be absorbed in studying the half-filled bookshelves which

ran across the wall between the two hall doors. Larry lay full length on the floor in front of the fire with an open book under his nose, while Susan and Pen sat in chairs close to the fire. Pat, after passing the plate around once, put it down on the floor in the centre of the circle and settled herself to preside over the remaining cookies, dispensing them when called for.

"Oh, come over here, Gard," cried Susan. "You should see the wonderful green and blue flames in the fire from that log we dragged up from the shore! Can't you stop reading just a few minutes and be sociable?"

Gardner was across the room, away from the rest of them, sitting in one of the deep window seats at the front. His knees were drawn up, and his head bent closely over a large book. He had paid no attention to any of the conversation and now his only answer to Susan's invitation was a grunt and a shake of his head.

"Let him alone, Susan," said her mother, "he has so little time to himself during the week to read and he's tired."

"Oh well," said Susan impatiently, "it seems as if they didn't *all* have to read *all* the time! I never saw such a family for reading. Look at them now, they're all holding books, even the ones that aren't reading. They never

go anywhere without books. It seems as if mother and I are the only ones who don't read every spare minute we get. And even Pat always carries her precious book with her list of dolls' names in it everywhere. And look at Larry, always reading about foreign countries. Got his nose in one of our old atlases this very minute. Sometimes it makes me tired, you can't get this family to do anything except work and read."

"Well, my dear," said Mr. Graham calmly, "this is a free country to that extent presumably. At least, if we do our work, we should be allowed to choose our own form of recreation. And if the form of recreation one takes doesn't hurt any one else and doesn't draw too heavily on the slim family exchequer, why—"

"Oh yes, dad dear," interrupted Susan affectionately, "you've said all that before and I suppose you're right, but being not specially fond of reading myself, I can't get the same thrill out of it. Do you like to read so much you forget everything and everybody else?" she asked, turning to Pen.

"No, I don't," answered Pen, "but I do forget everything else when I'm drawing. I like that the way they like reading, I guess."

"Oh," exclaimed Pat, who had been unusually quiet, "then will you make me some paper

dolls? Some of my family fell in the fire yesterday and got all burned up. I need some new ones awfully. The rest of them are *so* lonesome and sad. Will you make some right now *please?*”

“I haven’t anything to make them with here——” began Pen.

“Now, Pat,” interposed Susan, “do give Pen a chance to become acquainted first. She can make some next time she comes. It’s too dark in here this dull day, and we don’t want to light up when we have this lovely fire to look at.”

“I’ll bring some cards and paper and things next time,” said Pen quickly, for Pat looked very much disappointed, “and make them right away the first thing I get here. You can decide on the names of them between now and then.”

Pat brightened up immediately.

Pen had been looking about the big living room very much interested in seeing what furnishings the Grahams had to make it so home-like. It was surprising how home-like it did look and yet how little there was in it. There was one old-fashioned gate leg table, a small drop leaf table against the front wall between the two front windows and the rest of the furniture consisted chiefly of chairs, a few

shabby comfortable rockers and some of the rushbottom straight colonial type which went so well with the room. The walls had been papered a light gray and the floor, made of very wide old boards, had been painted a deeper gray. The only carpet was the worn-looking dull blue Chinese rug which Blair had been sweeping the first day Pen got acquainted with the Grahams. All the woodwork, which was really beautiful and extended in a wide dado more than three feet up from the floor all around the room and in quaint paneling around the frame of the deep-set windows, was freshly painted a creamy white.

Taken by itself, this white and gray and dull blue might have been rather cold and cheerless looking perhaps on a cloudy autumn day, but there were touches of color which relieved it and which Pen found very attractive and satisfying. Several sprays of the orange bitter-sweet in a variety of vases stood on the mantel and on the top of the bookshelves. There were several pictures on the walls, and in the window seats were cushions, faded and shabby most of them, but of lovely oranges, warm browns and blues. It showed, thought Pen, what can be done even when you have very little money, if the background of the room itself is good.

Anxious to see if there could possibly have been any truth in her dream, Pen asked if she might look at the other front room.

"Of course," said Susan, jumping up, "come along," and she took Pen across the wide front hall. There was no furniture in this room, only a cluster of wooden boxes, partly unpacked, and various odds and ends littered about on the floor. The woodwork and fireplace were almost identical with the living room, and Pen was disappointed.

"You see," she explained to Susan, "I had a dream, and it was so vivid that it seemed as if it must have been true. I can still see it as plain as plain can be. There was a panel beside a fireplace, and it slid aside when I pushed it and in back there was a secret staircase, leading down!"

Susan smiled.

"Well, I'm sorry it isn't here but then dreams don't really mean much, do you think? Perhaps it was in the room back in the wing where we're going to have our summer library."

She opened a door at the rear of the room, crossed a narrow hall and went a few steps down a dark corridor.

"This," she said, "is under the two smaller rooms I showed you upstairs in the left wing.

One of them is Blair's, you remember, and the other is empty. Isn't this a queer room?"

"Oh yes," exclaimed Pen, "but isn't it lovely! I think I like it best of any I've seen so far. But it isn't my dream room either."

The walls and ceiling of the entire room were wainscoted, in small square panels. It looked like a dark oak and was not painted like the other rooms. Bookcases with glass doors and leaded panes were built in along the inner wall and on either side of the big stone fireplace at the farther end of the room. The wall across from the door they entered by contained a whole row of windows with small quaint panes of glass, and in the center, one larger window with fanshaped top. Trees and bushes grew close outside and gave a vaguely gloomy, mysterious look to the room.

"There are such lovely windows in this house," said Pen, "but you could never see them from the outside because they were always boarded up so tightly. This is a wonderful room, I think."

They went back to the living room again and told the others about Pen's dream. After they had sat and talked a while longer, Pen realized by the gathering dusk that it was time for her to leave.

"But won't you stay and have supper with

us?" asked Mrs. Graham, "and afterwards some of the boys can walk home with you. It's a lonely walk, I'm afraid."

"Oh yes, do stay," added Susan, "there isn't much to eat except baked beans and bread and apple sauce, but it's good anyhow."

Pen sighed inwardly. Why did she always have to refuse invitations she would like to accept? She had already fallen in love with the big old house, bare and sparsely furnished though it was. And she was interested in the Grahams and grateful for their friendliness toward her. Even the ones who kept on reading seemed only to give the impression that it was because they were taking her into the family and not standing on ceremony on her account. And now they looked up, all except Gardner, and put aside their books prepared to be sociable for a change. It all tempted Pen mightily. The fire burned so gaily, there were so many cheerful faces—and outside, the rapidly falling twilight and a few drops of rain splashing against the window emphasized the attractions of staying cosily indoors.

But—there was that library book Aunt Emily wanted to read over Sunday. Pen knew that Miss Buffum closed the small library promptly at six o'clock. She also knew that if she failed to go for it, Aunt Emily

would be not only disappointed but extremely annoyed and that her annoyance was more than likely to take the form of making it difficult for Pen to come to see the Grahams as often as she wanted to. At this thought she made up her mind and reluctantly refused the invitation to stay to supper.

"Can't you go home any way except through the woods?" asked Susan. "It's getting dark, and that seems sort of lonely."

"Well, I can go out the front gate and down to the railroad track and along the shore from there home," answered Pen. "It's longer, but it's nearly all open and not so dark. But no matter which way I go, it's lonesome for the first half mile or so. I don't mind, though, really I don't."

Mr. Reeves got up from his chair, his tall thin figure casting a weird flickering shadow on the opposite wall, "I need a walk. I'll go with the young lady for a way if she will accept my middle-aged company."

"Middle-aged?" said Mr. Graham, mildly scornful. "You're nothing but a youngster, Don. My more-than-middle-aged bones, I regret to say, are so weary from my unwonted labors that I fear I cannot add my company to yours."

"Oh, but really, nobody needs to go with

me," exclaimed Pen, rather embarrassed. "It's raining, I think, and it would be too bad for any of you to get wet when it's not at all necessary."

"Don likes to walk in the rain and dark," said Susan, "so you needn't mind in the least. It won't hurt him. But you mustn't go without a hat, and you can have my old raincoat."

Pen did not like to accept, but Susan and her mother both insisted. "I don't go to school, you know," added Susan, "and I don't have to go out when the weather's bad. Anyway, there are old coats belonging to dad or Don or the boys I can borrow if I do."

As they stepped out of the front door, Pen found the rain was not heavy. It was more like a fine driving mist, but it was so damp and cold that she was glad for the protection of Susan's knitted cap and long ulster. Mr. Reeves was bareheaded though he had, Pen now noticed, a crop of very thick hair to protect him.

"But—but aren't you going to wear a coat? I mean—won't you be cold?" she asked in surprise, as he came out hatless and with no coat over his gray flannel shirt.

"Don't worry," said Susan reassuringly, "you'll get used to Don's queerness. He

doesn't do anything like other people. He's never cold."

Mr. Reeves smiled genially.

"Dear Susan," he murmured, as if he were talking to himself, "so young and so practical! It's a sad case. Still, time will do much, though I don't suppose even time will make Susan prefer poetry to potatoes."

Susan laughed good-naturedly.

"No, it won't, Don. Poetry is one of Don's hobbies. He'll probably recite it to you all the way home. He hates potatoes, and *I* love them."

"If you meet Blair," called Mrs. Graham from inside the house, "do send him home."

"If you meet a black-bearded pirate lurking about," added Larry, who stood at the door with them, "knock him down and make him tell you where the chest of Spanish ducats are buried——"

"*Is* buried, Grammarless Youth," corrected Mr. Reeves.

"What chest?" demanded Susan. "*Who* said there was any buried chest of gold?"

"*I* said so," retorted Larry airily, "and I'm going to find it first, and as soon as I do, I'm going to start for Africa and Australia exploring——"

"Oh, *stop*, Larry," commanded Susan, in a

quiet undertone, "you know mother hates to hear you talk about going away. Don't let her hear you. She's set her heart on your going to college next year."

A look of impatience showed for an instant on Larry's handsome face. "Why on earth *I* should be picked out when I'm just the one who doesn't want to go to college!" he muttered.

Pen caught this little aside between him and Susan, and later wondered over it and what it meant. How could the Grahams afford to send any of the children to college, and why should it be Larry?

CHAPTER VI

DON QUIXOTE ESCORTS PEN HOME

SUSAN's brief description of Mr. Reeves had made Pen feel rather shy about meeting him. She did not know just what she had expected, but somebody romantic, thin and melancholy perhaps, with a disinclination to meet people, including herself. Mr. Reeves turned out to be none of these. He was thin, but undeniably healthy-looking, and if he were romantic, it was not Pen's idea of the word, at any rate. Whatever sorrow or disappointment he had suffered seemed to have left no trace. As for his age, he was surely not more than thirty-five or thirty-six, according to her judgment. His smile was delightful, and his whole bearing one of completely carefree calm. While he had not taken much part in the general conversation, it did not appear to be because he was unsociable or disagreeable.

They tramped at first in complete silence toward the shore. Pen was trying to think of something to say to Mr. Reeves and wondering why some people found it so much easier than

others to talk to strangers. "How *can* you talk to any one who likes poetry better than anything else?" mused Pen, to whom it had never occurred that reading poetry might be pleasure. In her experience, it had meant only a queer kind of English that was harder to read and get the sense of than regular books. She liked phrases here and there occasionally, but her class-room study of poetry had consisted chiefly of explaining the meanings of unusual words. Poetry was not something to talk about in ordinary conversation.

The wind had been steadily rising ever since they left the house, and when they finally stepped out from behind the temporary shelter of a high sand dune onto the open shore, the full force of the east wind struck them. The ocean was roaring with the incessant crash of waves that looked wild and stormy, and through the fog sounded the mournful boom of the whistling buoy.

"Good old ocean," remarked Mr. Reeves, "getting its back up a bit, eh?" and went on:

" 'A strong nor'wester's blowing, Bill;
Hark! don't ye hear it roar now!
Lord help them, how I pities them
Unhappy folks on shore now.' "

Pen laughed and thought to herself that she didn't mind *that* kind of poetry, if that were

poetry. She would be all right if he didn't start anything harder than that to understand.

"Hullo, what's this?" exclaimed Mr. Reeves.

They had suddenly come upon some one in the fog. It was Blair, swinging a long-handled shovel. When he saw them, his face turned red and he appeared embarrassed.

"Digging for treasure?" cried Mr. Reeves cheerfully.

"None of your business what I'm doing," returned Blair. It was evident that he was annoyed at being caught that way.

"Quite so," agreed Mr. Reeves blandly, not at all troubled by the ungraciousness of this reply, "I should have known you had the shovel for playing in the sand. Youngsters all do it, of course."

"Think you're funny," growled Blair, still huffy. He flung down the shovel and turned to go.

"On the contrary, I think *you* are. Exceedingly so. Run on home, son, your mother wants you. And take the shovel, we need it."

Then, after Blair had disappeared into the fog and they were proceeding on their walk, he said, "Poor Blair, he's not such a bad fellow. He'll get over this half-way stage of knowing it all, and some day he'll be a toler-

able member of society. It annoys him to be teased, but it's good for him occasionally."

Pen did not know what answer to make to this, so they walked on again in silence.

"Poetry," said Mr. Reeves, as though he were answering a question Pen had just asked, "is meant to be used, not merely shut up in a book. Think of the pity of all those beautiful sounds, those wonderful combinations of words, true melodies of sound, kept out of our lives! There they are, ours for the asking, ours to repeat and enjoy and linger over and let sink into our subconscious minds and fill our thoughts with beautiful images! And instead, we use our tongues for expressing a lot of the most unmelodious thoughts in unmelodious sounds—talking about the weather, and housecleaning and Susan's precious potatoes and such things, which, even if they *can* be said beautifully and musically, never are."

"But—wouldn't it be funny if everybody talked poetry?" ventured Pen, feeling a little out of her element.

"Better to talk poetry than the kind of nonsense that most people talk," returned Mr. Reeves, always in his calm, unargumentative way. "I can't make poetry myself but I can repeat other people's and enjoy it, and I'd rather hear it than anything else. Don't be

alarmed, I never insist upon reciting poetry except to the youngsters."

"Oh, I'd be very glad to have you," murmured Pen.

Mr. Reeves looked at her rather doubtfully, Pen thought. Then he smiled suddenly and said, "*You* ought to know more poetry. You'd appreciate it—an artist who loves beautiful colors and shapes and all the rhythm and sweep of line and curve, and the significance of light and shade—why, you can't help loving poetry! It's simply another form of beauty. The trouble probably is that you never hear any, and you're not introduced to it the right way."

All the rest of the way Mr. Reeves recited bits of verse until when he left Pen at the outskirts of Megamoc, she found herself interested, as she had never been before, in the beauty of spoken sound, and surprised to know that real poetry need not be full of strange words that had to be looked up in dictionaries.

Luck was with Pen that afternoon for she reached the library just before Miss Buffum put on her coat and hat. The day was saved! With the important book tucked under arm, she scurried home to get the early Saturday night supper.

All evening and over Sunday Pen re-lived her afternoon at the Grahams. There were a number of questions which she could not answer. What had Blair been digging for on the beach? Why was Gardner so unhappy? Why did Susan watch her mother so anxiously? Why did they want Larry to go to college if he didn't want to? Where was the secret staircase? And if there were one, where did it lead to? All these whys and wheres fascinated Pen and gave her food for thought. The Golden Orchard was fast becoming an interesting mystery.

CHAPTER VII

SUSAN TELLS PEN HER WORRIES

DEXTER's request for a sketch of Miss Effie Bell had suggested to Pen an idea for his Christmas present. She decided to make sketches of all the Graham family and their house and bind the sheets into a cover which should have an appropriate design of russet apples and pine cones on it. Knowing he would welcome it more heartily than any mere present she could buy, she decided to set to work immediately.

As early as she could get away on Saturday, she tied up a neat package of her sketching things and the necessary paints for making paper dolls for Pat, and started off.

"I declare, Pen, you beat all for finding friends off in the country," exclaimed Aunt Emily. "I thought when Dexter Alan went to New York, you'd stay in Megamoc. But now it's those Grahams way out there in the middle of nowhere."

"Well, Aunt Emily," replied Pen patiently, "I've worked all morning, and been home all

week, and I do think I might have one afternoon to do as I like.”

This mild protest, which was made entirely respectfully, did not appease Mrs. Atkinson. She could not forgive Pen for having been preferred by the Forresters to her own daughter.

“I haven’t said you couldn’t go,” she retorted sharply. “Goodness knows, you’ve no cause to complain about freedom. If you were working in a factory or back of a counter, earning your living, you might think you didn’t have much liberty. It isn’t many poor girls who can keep on going to school and have a good home and Saturday afternoons free——”

The hot tears came to Pen’s eyes as she left the house in the middle of this familiar tirade. The indirect reference to her orphaned state of dependence upon the Atkinsons always hurt her. Why couldn’t Aunt Emily be just a little bit kinder in her charity, and show just a little love for her sister’s only child?

“All the housework I do is enough to pay for my board,” thought Pen wretchedly, as she brushed away her tears and swallowed the lump in her throat. “I wish I *could* go away and work. Other girls my age do it, too. And yet if I did, Aunt Emily would be simply furious at my ingratitude. She can’t get along without my help and she knows it. I don’t



"IN THE GOLDEN ORCHARD SHE FOUND A BONFIRE IN FULL
BLAZE."

see what on earth will happen when I do go to New York. I don't know how I can stand even one more winter here if she's going to be so disagreeable all the time. It seems twice as bad since people like the Forresters and Dexter have been so nice to me. I used to think it was all my fault. Oh dear, I wish I belonged to a *real* family, even if they were poor like the Grahams. I'd be glad to work hard if I didn't always feel that somebody begrudged the food I ate and thought I should be working twice as hard to pay for it."

Absorbed in these unhappy thoughts, Pen hurried over the route to the Golden Orchard, scarcely noticing any of the brilliant autumn colors which were now even more glorious than on her previous visit. It was a clear, still day, with a crispness in the air that spoke definitely of coming winter. Along the distant horizon lay a violet haze.

In the Golden Orchard she found a bonfire in full blaze. The Grahams were burning up the leaves and rubbish they had accumulated in their autumn house-and-garden-cleaning. Only Susan, Larry, Blair and Pat were in sight. They were all busily feeding the fire and racing about from place to place, gathering more fuel to heap into the flames, which roared and

crackled and leaped straight up into the quiet, windless air.

"Hullo, Pen," they exclaimed, all except Blair, whose greeting came a little later and rang less heartily than the others, "want to help burn up the rubbish?"

"Of course," replied Pen readily, putting down her package and joining them. "What a grand bonfire you've got!"

Susan wore to-day a pair of old gray tweed knickers, gray flannel shirt and blue tie, a costume extremely becoming, Pen thought, to her slim figure and short, bright reddish hair. Seeing Pen's gaze arrested by this costume, Pat edged up, "I've got knickers too, and a shirt and tie, just like Susan," she announced proudly. And so indeed she had.

"Mine are old things of Don's," explained Susan, "and Pat wanted some too, so mother made hers out of some of the boys' things. Mother's wonderful at sewing and making clothes. I've decided to wear knickers all the time after this. I hate skirts anyhow."

"I'm going to wear them too," chimed in Pat. Pen thought Pat made the quaintest little figure she had ever seen. Her boyish clothes did not seem to belong with her long, thick, old-fashioned curls and serious face, so unmistakably that of a little girl.

"Where are your dolls, Pat?" asked Larry. "You can't carry them around when you've got that rig on. Besides, they'll think you're their father staying home from work all day, and you'll never be able to explain what happened to their mother. Golly, you're in for trouble with your family, Pats!"

"Let's throw your dolls in the fire," suggested Blair. "They'd make a nice blaze. Boys don't play with dolls."

"I'm not a boy," retorted Pat excitedly. "Am I, Susan? Don't you touch my dolls, Blair Montgomery Graham, don't you dare! Don't you dare touch *anything* of mine, don't you——"

"Oh, for the love of Mike, shut up!" exclaimed Blair disgustedly. "No one's going to hurt your old dolls. I wouldn't touch them with a ten-foot pole, silly things."

"Aren't silly! You needn't insult my family," cried Pat, tears and terror mingling in her voice.

But Susan interposed, "Pat darling, don't let Blair's teasing bother you. You know perfectly well it's against the rules of the house for any one to interfere with any one else's property. And your family is *your* property. Of course it is."

"But I don't think Blair pays any 'tention

to the rules of the house," persisted Pat. "I saw him take some keys out of dad's top drawer this morning."

At this statement, Susan and Larry both looked at Blair with startled astonishment plainly written on their faces. Blair turned crimson and looked away. Then he retorted boisterously, "Didn't touch his keys. Pat doesn't know what she's talking about. I was just looking for—for a clean handkerchief."

Larry burst into derisive laughter.

"Well, there must have been something awfully wrong with you, ole kid, when you went and looked for a clean handkerchief. Usually ma has to force it on you——"

"Aw, cut it out," retorted Blair, who still looked distinctly sheepish.

"Well," said Susan firmly, "you certainly have no business going to dad's bureau for anything, Blair, and you know it. That's one of the most important rules of this house. 'Respect your neighbor's property and don't touch it without his permission.' " She turned to Pen and explained, "Don's got a book he writes all our rules in and it's called 'Rules and Precepts for the Guidance of the Graham Family.' "

"I want Pen to make paper dolls," begged

Pat, who had lost interest in the effect of her announcement.

Susan smiled ruefully and looked at Pen, "We promised, didn't we? That's another one of the rules, 'Always keep a promise.' We'll let the boys take care of the fire. I ought to go in anyway and finish some mending before mother gets home. She's in Trimville shopping with dad."

The three girls went into the house together and settled themselves in a corner of the living room. Susan, with the big mending basket, curled up on a window seat, with Pen and Pat at a table, drawn close to her to get the best light from the window. Soon all three were busily at work and talking at the same time as fast as they could go. Or, to be strictly accurate, Susan did most of the talking.

"Gard stayed in town to-day," she said. "He's going to clerk in a store in Trimville Saturday afternoons and evenings to get extra money. And Don's away, too. We don't do any lessons on Saturday, and he often takes a lunch and goes for an all day tramp by himself. He said he was going down the shore."

Pat looked up.

"He took four slices of bacon and four slices of bread and four apples," she recited solemnly, "and he said he always takes four of

everything 'cause he has four different people to feed. One is himself, one is for Aldous, one is for Bailey, and one is for Reeves—that makes four!”

“Don’s funny,” said Susan indulgently, “but he’s a dear, and I don’t know how we’d get along without him. You see, he has a very small income of his own, and he just practically gives it all to mother for the rest of us. He never buys anything except a few books. He wears the same clothes for years—washes and presses them himself.”

Pen wondered fleetingly whether Mr. and Mrs. Graham would approve of Susan speaking so freely of their private circumstances. She had never met any one quite so frank and open as Susan Graham. Money matters in Megamoc were things you never told your neighbors about. The state of one’s actual financial condition was kept a deep secret, regardless of what style you presented to the outward view. Pen herself had absolutely no idea of how much money her Uncle Lije was worth nor how much income his store represented. Aunt Emily loved to complain of their poverty, but Pen knew instinctively that this attitude was partly put on. They owned their house, always repapered and re-painted and made necessary repairs, and Evelyn, at least, was able to have

as many clothes and good times as the rest of the girls and boys in Megamoc. If Pen, however, had asked for actual figures from her aunt, she would have been promptly reprimanded for impertinence. Indeed, she could not imagine herself even asking.

The paper-doll-making proceeded rapidly, while Susan entertained Pen with an account of what they had been doing during the week. They had found no secret staircase, and the boys' search in the old, dark, dungeon-like cellar had failed to reveal any hint of an opening into a smugglers' underground passage to the shore. Altogether it had been extremely tame so far as developing any mystery in the architecture of the house was concerned.

"I haven't gone very far in the attic myself," went on Susan, "because I've had to help sew and clean and mend and do outdoor work. Mother wants us all to stay out as much as we can while the weather's good. And then we go in swimming every morning after we've had lessons, just before lunch."

"Gracious, isn't it terribly cold?" exclaimed Pen, "people in Megamoc never go in after the middle of September, and here it is October!"

"We like it," said Susan, "we're all as hard as rocks, really, except mother. Don's the best of all. Even Pat goes in, but I don't believe I

shall much longer. It's getting too icy to suit me."

When Pen had finished the paper dolls, Pat received them with great delight and immediately took them out to show Larry.

"Would you mind if I sketched you?" asked Pen, who found a sudden inspiration in Susan's boyish figure, posed against the square panes of glass with the paneled woodwork of the deep-set window forming an extremely attractive and appropriate frame.

"Go ahead," said Susan, "if it doesn't interfere with my talking. I'm sort of nervous and restless to-day, and it seems as if I had to talk. I always feel queer when mother is away. She almost never does go and so it seems like a different place here without her. I do wish she'd come back. Dad says I haven't any imagination till it comes to wondering what might happen to mother when she's away from home. I don't care, I know I worry about her. And just now, ever since we came here, there's something not just right. I hate mysteries, and yet I feel as if every one in the family except me is worrying and fussing about something, or trying to do something without letting any one else know about it. I can't make out what it's all about, except that we seem to

have less money than we ever did before.” She paused and frowned.

Pen looked sympathetic.

“I’m so sorry you’re worried,” she said, wishing she knew what to say to make Susan feel more cheerful. She went on sketching rapidly, for she found Susan a very satisfactory subject and she was anxious to get as good a picture of her as possible.

Susan picked out another stocking from the pile she was mending and examined it carefully. Then she continued, “Well, mother and dad have begun to talk about having Blair go to work, and that must mean something’s wrong and that we need money badly, for they’ve always said none of us should stop studying until we were eighteen, no matter how poor we were. And Blair’s barely seventeen now.”

“Is Larry older or younger than Blair?” asked Pen very much interested.

“Why, Larry is older than Blair, about a year, and that’s one reason it seems queer they’re thinking of sending Blair to work instead of Larry. Blair’s crazy to study mining engineering—” (Pen thought of Blair digging on the beach and wondered for a moment if there were any connection between the two facts) “and Larry doesn’t want to study *any-*

thing. He wants to go away and join an exploring expedition or work his way round the world somehow or other. He hates to study, and yet they want him to go to college! And Gard wanted terribly to go to college, but he had to work. Gard loves books and history and languages, and things like anthropology. He's the realest bookworm of us all and he's always studying by himself. I think Gard would like to be in a library or be a professor at a college or something like that. He simply hates business. He ought to have gone to college—it's a shame he couldn't."

Susan paused while looking for the brown darning cotton, and screwed up her eyes as she threaded the needle. Then she continued, "I don't understand it at all. There's Gard and Blair and myself, all three of us would like to go to college—only I guess I couldn't be spared very well—and then, for some reason, they pick on Larry as the only one to have the chance, and Larry just happens to be the very one who simply hates the idea and doesn't want to go."

"It is strange," said Pen wonderingly, "but doesn't your mother say why? Or don't you talk about it?"

"Well, not much," admitted Susan reluctantly, "mother says that there is some money in a bank somewhere that some relative of ours

whose name was 'Leverett'—that's the Leverett Larry's middle name is for—left for him to have for his college education. Larry insists that he won't use it, that if it's for him, he can give it to one of us instead. But mother gets rather stern about it and says we won't argue and that he can't do it, that the money was left for that purpose, and it must be used the way it was intended. And when mother says that we won't talk about it any further and shuts her mouth up tight, well, then of course, there isn't anything else to do except keep still. The worst of it is that it's causing trouble with Blair because he thinks there's no reason why *he* shouldn't have the money, and I believe he's jealous of Larry because he thinks mother is specially fond of him and is trying to give him more chances than the rest of us. Sometimes Blair can be awfully disagreeable."

"What do you think yourself?" inquired Pen. "Do you think Larry ought to go to college when he doesn't want to?"

"Of course, I don't suppose I know all the circumstances," replied Susan, "but if you ask me, I think it's foolish that somebody who's been dead years and years should be the one to decide what any of us should do. How did that old Leverett know what Larry would turn

out like when he got to be college age? It's so silly to take it for granted that every one will want to go to college! And if Larry really and truly is ready to hand over the money to Gard or Blair, I don't see why mother doesn't let him. It makes me tired! Larry has come so near going off in spite of it all that it keeps mother worried most of the time, I believe. She seems to be determined that he must stay here and prepare for college. And Larry is discontented because he *has* to stay, and the other boys because they can't have what he's going to have. It's all a horrid mess."

Susan sighed and stretched herself. Then she sat up again and continued her mending, pushing and pulling at her needle in her characteristically vigorous manner.

"Don't say I told you all this, will you, Pen?" she added.

"Oh no, of course not," promised Pen.

"Money is such an awful thing," went on Susan. "I never realized till just recently what it means to be poor. I mean, of course, we've never been anything except poor, but we've always had at least enough to eat and wear, and we've always had lots of fun. You see, we've always lived out in the country more or less by ourselves, and in places where we really didn't need a lot of money to be happy.

We have had rivers or ponds or the ocean to swim in and trees to climb and hay to play in and in winter there were coasting and skating and all sorts of fun in the snow. Of course, our clothes were old but we didn't mind because we didn't go to school. But now we are older, and Gard has gone to work, we have all begun to think about the future, and what we want to do, why, everything is different. Now we really do need money badly!"

"Do you suppose Blair was digging for buried treasure on the beach?" asked Pen smiling.

"Well, if he was, he's a silly idiot," returned Susan decidedly. "It's a waste of time to try to get money *that* way. You can dig all your life and not get anything. I don't believe for a minute there's any money hidden around this old house anyway. Why should there be?"

"Oh, but—but don't you feel there's a mystery or something about the house?" asked Pen, rather shyly, dashed by Susan's extremely practical and unromantic views. "Doesn't it make you feel as if it *might* have a hidden treasure? You know, sometimes people were queer years ago, and they didn't put their money in banks so much as they do now. They used to hide it in all sorts of funny places. Why, Janet Brown's great-uncle left them an

old house when he died and they didn't know he had any money at all. When they cleaned the house and made some repairs so they could let it, they found ten-dollar bills stuck in funny places all over the house. In one room, he'd made a hole in the plaster of the wall and put the bills in and then papered the wall right over them. In another room he took a brick out of the chimney, and put some in behind that, and there was some more under a board in the bottom of a cupboard that was up in the wall of one of the rooms. I think they found about five hundred dollars in all!"

Susan looked interested but not particularly impressed.

"Well, I suppose it could happen once in a while and has happened, but that's no reason to take it for granted in this house. Nobody ever heard of any here, did they? It seems to me so silly to come to live in an old house that's been shut up for years and years, and just because it *has* been shut up and weird-looking and lonely, start right away hunting for a secret staircase and a buried treasure or a smugglers' underground passage to the ocean! I don't see any *sense* to it."

Pen could not help laughing though she felt rather ashamed of her own easily-stirred imagination and interest in the possible romance of

the old house. In the light of Susan's eminently sensible ideas, it *did* seem silly. Just the same, you never could tell, and Pen would not give up her dreams entirely.

"But it's so prosaic *not* to hope there may be something like that," she protested. "I'm just going to keep on imagining stories and mysteries about it anyhow, Susan, whatever you say!"

"There's mystery enough for me in the way every one is talking and acting, and in this business about Larry's going to college," said Susan, frowning again worriedly. "I wonder where mother is. She surely ought to be back by now. She'll be terribly tired if she doesn't get home soon. I *would* like to find a treasure for mother's sake, so she could have a rest for once! She's——"

A sudden dull noise startled them. There was a knocking sound that seemed to come from the cellar.

It was growing dusk already, and the big room full of soft, gray shadows was very quiet as they stopped to listen.

"What—what was that?" asked Pen, trying not to show that she had really been frightened for a moment.

"I don't know, probably one of the boys. It startled me for a minute, it's so quiet here to-

day. I wonder where they all are? This seems such a big house when it's empty. I don't hear the children anywhere." Susan always spoke of the rest of the young Grahams, including Gard who was a number of years older than herself, as "the children." She jumped up and ran to the kitchen, and Pen could hear her opening the cellar door and shouting, "Boys! Larry! Who's down there?" Susan, Pen felt sure, was never afraid of anything.

She heard a muffled answer but could not make out the words.

"It *was* Blair," said Susan, coming in again a few moments later, after she had been to the back door where Pen heard her talking to Larry and Pat outside, "I don't know what he's doing down there. He spends a lot of time in the cellar for some reason or other. Larry and Pat have gone to the crossing to meet the 4:50 train. Larry thinks mother and dad ought to come in on that one sure. Guess I'll have to light up if I do any more mending. Don't think I will though, I'm tired of sewing."

Just then they heard Blair stamping upstairs and into the hall toward the front door.

"Where are you going, Blair?" called Susan.

"Out," returned Blair, and slammed the door.

Susan looked exasperated.

"He's the most annoying boy! Never tells you anything. Well, now we're all alone in the house." She came over to see what Pen was doing. "Oh, is that the sketch of me? Isn't it wonderful! Why, you draw beautifully."

While she was examining it, the door opened and Mr. Reeves appeared.

"Oh, here's Don. Look, Don, isn't this splendid?"

She handed him the paper while Pen sat back and wondered shyly what he would think of it. She liked Mr. Reeves and felt that she wanted his praise.

"Why, it's our Susan, red hair and all!" He looked at Pen kindly, "My dear, you are a very fortunate young lady. You have a gift in those fingers I would give much to possess. You are going to see beauty all your life and make beauty for others to see. You should be very happy!"

"It's wonderful," put in Susan again, before Pen could do anything but blush, "and I just know she'll make a lot of money some day. I wish I had your talent, Pen. You won't have to rely on finding any fortune or buried treasure."

"Are *you* expecting to get rich that way, *Susanna mia?*" asked Mr. Reeves, looking at her with a curious twinkle in his eyes.

"No, *I'm* not," returned Susan, with scorn-

ful emphasis, "but we've been talking about money and Pen thinks there ought to be something romantic like that in here somewhere. And I said it was nonsense, all this talk about secret staircases and the house being so mysterious. I don't see anything in it myself."

"You wouldn't need to be told that Susan never cared for fairy stories when she was little, would you?" asked Mr. Reeves smiling at Pen. "Well, just to add a little interest to the matter, I don't mind saying that I have a feeling something *is* going to happen while we're living in this house that will surprise even the intensely practical and unromantic young lady who has just been expressing herself so clearly and definitely."

Pen and Susan stared at him speechless for a moment. Then Susan exclaimed, "I don't know whether you're fooling or not, Don. I can't always be sure about you. But for heaven's sake, *please* tell us what you know."

"Don't know anything myself! It's simply a *feeling* I get from this house," and he smiled at Susan's expression of mingled disgust and disappointment.

"Well, if that's all, I don't intend to get excited," she retorted, "somebody will have to find something or show me something definite

before I begin to believe. But whatever it is, I only hope it has money connected with it."

She looked suddenly around the almost dark room and exclaimed, "My, it's lonesome here with every one away! Isn't it quiet?"

As for Pen, she had been falling under the spell of the big, lonely house all afternoon. She became conscious again of the amazing fact that she was really in the old Juniper James house which had stood so many years all alone and tightly boarded up, its rooms dark and empty. She realized too how far out in the country it was, set in its grove of gloomy pines and spruces. She wasn't exactly afraid, but she was glad to know that she did not have to go upstairs and walk alone through the long bare halls and into any of the half dark rooms. As they stood there a moment, all three silently listening after Susan's last remark, Pen could hear the sound of the ocean, a quiet, far-away murmur. A board creaked somewhere in the house.

Suddenly Mr. Reeves recited in a soft undertone:

“ ‘Only the sea intoning,
Only the wainscot mouse,
Only the wild wind moaning,
Over the lonely house.’ ”

Another board creaked. Pen felt her heart beat faster, there was a tingle at the roots of her hair.

And then Susan broke the spell, exclaiming joyously, "Oh, I hear the family coming home! Goody! It's mother and dad and the children. You light the lamp, Don, please. I'm going to meet them," and she ran out of the door.

In a few minutes the room was full of people talking and laughing. The lamplight dispelled the darkness, and Pen completely forgot the empty rooms and corridors in the old house.

As soon as the bustle of the returning family had subsided somewhat, she got her hat and sweater, hoping that no one would feel obliged to escort her home. Mrs. Graham, who was resting under Susan's orders in the most comfortable chair in the room, saw her and said, "You understand that we'd like you to stay to supper any time you come, Penelope? Couldn't you stay to-night?"

Pen, remembering Aunt Emily's last words and the none too pleasant expression on her face, again declined the invitation, though much against her will.

"Next time, do ask your aunt if you can stay," said Susan. "It's too bad you have to go so soon. You could stay all night just as

well as not—I've got a big bed, and you could sleep with me."

"Thanks ever so much," said Pen gratefully. "I really wish I could. I'll ask Aunt Emily next Saturday and perhaps I can then."

"Larry, suppose you walk home with Pen," suggested Mrs. Graham. "Don has been tramping all day and has had more than enough exercise, I guess."

"All right, sure thing!" said Larry readily.

And so Pen had a different escort this time. Larry entertained her the first part of the walk chiefly by the way he seemed to look for obstacles to jump or climb over. His progress was a series of leaps and runs, until finally they reached the shore. Then he walked more quietly along the beach at her side.

"I've been looking for the secret staircase you saw in your dream," he said suddenly, "but hanged if I can find it. I've tapped and pushed and pulled at every panel in the whole darn house, and they're all tight."

"It's funny I had that dream," laughed Pen. "Susan doesn't think there's any reason for there being *any* treasure *anywhere anyhow*."

"Well, there isn't any really sensible reason maybe," agreed Larry, "but then, lots of queer things happen whether there's a good reason for them or not."

“Are *you* specially anxious to find money?” ventured Pen. She felt that this was a personal question, but she was so interested to know Larry’s thoughts, after what Susan had told her, that she decided to risk it.

“Don’t care specially about it for myself,” returned Larry, and Pen did not doubt the sincerity of his reply, “but I’d like it for Gard and Blair. They want money pretty badly, and gee, I wish I could give it to them! And mother and Tommy have had to work hard all the time and never had any special fun like other girls, with pretty clothes and things.”

“But if you had plenty of money for them, and enough for yourself too,” persisted Pen, “what would you do?”

“Me? Oh, I’d travel. I want to see every city in the world, and every big mountain and all the big rivers and jungles and deserts and—well, the whole show.” And then, to Pen’s amusement, he began to recite Kipling’s “The Long Trail.”

“Oh my, you all seem to know poetry,” exclaimed Pen, “isn’t it rather—unusual?”

“Well, it’s not so funny that we do know a little,” said Larry cheerfully, “Don’s been dingling it into us for years and years, you know. He made us learn a lot, taking it by and large. I don’t care for the sappy stuff myself.

I like Kipling and poetry about traveling and sailing and the ocean, and that kind of thing. None of this Grecian urn and nightingale flub-dub for me—*Look out!*”

They were walking close to the water, and a sudden wave had swept up farther than its fellows and almost caught them. They raced out of reach, and then continued their walk at a higher level. Through the soft darkness they could just see the white breakers and the thin, foam-edged wave sliding up on the sloping shore and sinking back with a hiss and swish into the shining sand.

“Gee!” said Larry suddenly and earnestly, “look at that great big ocean, miles and miles of perfectly good waves and water, starting right here and ready and waiting to be sailed on. It makes me sick having to stay home. I want to go to sea.”

Pen shivered.

“I don’t think it looks very nice now, so cold and black and deep! I like it daytimes better. I’m glad I’m on shore.”

“I’m not,” said Larry emphatically, “I’d start to-night if I had half a chance. It’s not a bad night either. Look, some of the stars are out. Golly, wouldn’t I like to see the stars in the tropics! There must be millions on those clear nights!”

Pen felt an answering thrill as he spoke. She felt sure that Larry Graham was a born wanderer, and that he would not be contented until he was out on the Long Trail himself.

Just then they arrived at the point where Mr. Reeves had left Pen the previous Saturday, and she stood still to tell Larry he needn't come any farther with her.

"Say, I hope you didn't mind my spouting Kipling at you," said Larry apologetically, "I bet Don shot poetry at you all the way home last week, didn't he?"

Pen laughed.

"But I liked it. I'm glad you did. I never knew poetry was meant to be used till I met your family. I didn't even know I liked it. But now I'm sure I'm going to."

"Well, you can't help getting some if you are with the Graham family at all. We use it everyday, not just Sundays and holidays," and he smiled, a friendly, good-natured smile which Pen found irresistible.

CHAPTER VIII

THE STORY OF HOW THE GOLDEN ORCHARD GOT ITS NAME

PEN'S Sunday letter to Dexter Alan was longer than any she had written since he left Megamoc that fall. His answer came on Friday of the same week.

"Dear Sammie: The glories of New York grow dim and pale beside the thrilling mysteries of the house in the Golden Orchard! It beats all, as your respected Aunt Emily would say, how you manage to get into any little excitement that's going. I'm not sure that I don't think you're somehow responsible for it, your own quiet little self! Be that as it may, I pine to hear more. Keep on the job and unravel all the mysteries, please!

"The treasure idea particularly appeals to me, but just the same and without wishing to throw any cold water on your enthusiasm, I would suggest that you don't get your hopes up too high on that score. Of course, as you so wisely say, strange things have happened. For instance, could anything be stranger or more

wonderful than that my book, which didn't win the prize, is going to be published and that I am living here in New York with Mr. Clayton?

"But here is *my* version of the treasure. If I weren't too tired, I would write it all out more carefully for you in beautiful language and make a real story of it. This is just a sort of outline.

"Once upon a time there was a man who lived in a big old house near the sea. He lived all alone, with only a cat for company, and he never went anywhere except to walk up and down the shore. He didn't like cities and towns because there were people in them, and he liked nobody except his old cat.

"One year there was a terrible storm, and it raged and roared and howled and tore for three whole days. And when it was over, the beach was strewn with driftwood and sea-wrack and shells and all sorts of queer objects, washed up by the sea. Among the flotsam and jetsam, the man found on the beach an enormous old chest, and when he opened it, it was full of beautiful gold pieces! There were heaps and heaps, at least a bushel of them.

"He hurriedly carried it all up to his house, first the gold in bags and baskets, and then the empty chest, for it was too heavy to lift full of

treasure. When he got it there, he sat and looked at it and gloated over it and wondered what to do with it. He was afraid to keep it in the house for fear some one might come and steal it from him. So, after pondering a long time, he had the clever idea that he would divide it into little piles and bury them, one at the foot of each apple tree in his orchard. It was fall and he had just gathered in a nice heap of red apples from his trees which were bearing that season for the first time.

“And so he did bury the gold at the foot of each tree. Then he went into his house and took the queer old chest and he hid it in a very safe place which no one else knew about. You got to it by a secret staircase which was back of a panel in one of the walls. (I suspect, Sammie, it was the one you dreamed about!)

“All winter he chuckled to himself at the thought of his beautiful shiny gold pieces scattered all over the orchard, and he planned that, at the end of the summer, he would dig them up and buy a ship and take the cat and sail to a desert island in the Pacific Ocean where there would be no people at all, and where it would be warm and sunny all the time—for the cat hated cold weather and rain and fog and snow.

“Well, to make a long story short, when the next fall came around, the man and the cat set

out to dig up the treasure. He dug and dug, and lo and behold, there wasn't a trace anywhere, under any of the trees, of the beautiful buried gold! And then, as he was sitting on the ground resting under the last tree, a ripe apple fell down and landed just in front of him. He stared at it in amazement.

"Instead of being a *red* apple, it was a dull golden yellow, a color something like soft, antique gold! He looked up and saw that all the apples were gold. He looked at his other trees, and all the apples in the orchard were now gold!

"And then he realized what had happened to his buried treasure—it had turned into a Golden Orchard!

"So that's my version of it, Sammie dear, and if there's any deep moral, you'll have to find it yourself. The only one I can think of is—don't bury your money or plan to spend it just for yourself and cat! Put it in a reliable bank, or give some one a good time with it while you have it.

"I like your Grahams—especially Sensible Susan, who stands out strongly in the midst of so much poetry and mystery-hunting. As for Larry, has it occurred to you he may be an

adopted child with money left in trust for him? This is merely my first guess."

Dexter's letter set Pen to wondering more than ever and made her anxious to get out again to the Grahams. She liked the story of the way the Golden Orchard got its name, and she thought it would amuse the Grahams.

Could there be anything in Dexter's idea about Larry? There might be, reflected Pen, for Larry certainly did not look like the rest of the family, though he didn't seem different in any other way.

She felt a suddenly increased interest in Larry Graham. If he were an orphan, then there was a bond of sympathy between them.

"He was luckier than I was," she thought wistfully. "Mr. and Mrs. Graham have been wonderful to him, and he certainly couldn't suspect from their treatment that he wasn't one of their own children—if he really isn't! Wish I knew. Susan evidently doesn't. I think I won't say anything right away and see what happens next."

Unfortunately for Pen's newly-aroused curiosity, she was prevented from going to the Grahams' on Saturday. Aunt Emily went to bed with a bad cold, and it was naturally out of the question for Pen to think of leaving her. This was not only a disappointment to her for

herself, but she was worried because she could not send any word to the Grahams who were expecting her.

About the middle of Sunday afternoon, Pen and Evelyn were in the kitchen finishing the dishes. They had had a rather later dinner than usual. Mrs. Atkinson was still in bed, and Uncle Lije had gone to the barn to putter around in his regular Sunday afternoon fashion.

"Say, Pen," said Evelyn, "do you think ma's very sick?"

"Why, not awfully," answered Pen, "but I guess if she isn't any better by to-morrow, we'd better get Dr. Blakeson to come in. One of us will have to stay home from school to-morrow anyhow, I guess," knowing very well who it would be.

"Well, I wondered whether she'd get my dress done for Anita Lamb's party Friday night. I haven't got a thing to wear, and I've got to have it."

Pen could not help thinking of the difference in Susan Graham's attitude toward her mother, and Evelyn's toward hers.

"Don't see why people have to get sick," went on Evelyn. "Of course, I'm sorry if ma is sick, but I don't think there's much the matter with her. And I don't see what I'm going

to do if she can't finish that dress. Anita's going to have her cousins from Boston here, Alice and Jack Thompson. 'Member they were at the Fair last summer? Awful good-looking chap, and the girl's got swell clothes. I've got to have my new dress. Everything else I own looks like it came from a hick town."

"Well," said Pen smiling, "you're welcome to any evening gown in *my* wardrobe."

"Thanks," laughed Evelyn, "I don't seem to remember any that would be specially becoming to my style of beauty. Oh, look, Pen, who's that coming up here? What a queer couple!"

Pen turned to look out of the window and saw Susan and Larry Graham striding up toward the house.

"Why, it's two of the Grahams," she exclaimed, and ran to the kitchen door to greet them.

"Hullo, Pen," cried Susan, "I thought this was the right house. We came to see if you were sick because you didn't come yesterday."

"I'm not sick, but Aunt Emily is, so I couldn't leave home. Do come in, I'm so glad to see you both." She led them into the kitchen and introduced them to Evelyn.

"This is my cousin, Evelyn Atkinson.

Evelyn, this is Susan and Larry Graham who live out in the Juniper James place.”

Susan and Larry greeted Evelyn with their usual straightforward heartiness. Evelyn, looking them up and down and assuming her most pronounced society tone, remarked coolly, “How do you do? Pardon us for receiving you in the kitchen. It’s hardly the correct thing for a Sunday afternoon call. Won’t you come into the other room?”

“It’s hardly the correct thing to come calling in clothes like ours on Sunday,” returned Larry promptly, quite unabashed by Evelyn’s lofty manner.

“We came to see Pen,” said Susan bluntly, “and if she still has dishes to finish, we’ll stay out here, thank you.”

“Oh, very well,” replied Evelyn condescendingly. “Since it’s an *informal* call, perhaps the kitchen will do.”

She eyed the visitors curiously, noting Susan’s short, tumbled red hair, her gray flannel shirt and knickers, old blue sweater, blue wool stockings and worn brown oxfords, noting also Larry’s equally worn clothes. Everything they had on showed signs of long use, a definite shabbiness which lacked any redeeming touch of style or suggestion of by-gone glory.

Pen saw Evelyn’s eyes linger on Larry’s

handsome face and his tall athletic figure, and knew instinctively that Evelyn was at last interested in the Grahams.

There was an awkward silence for a moment, and then a fretful voice calling Evelyn's name forced that young lady to excuse herself and leave. Pen could see that she went reluctantly.

As soon as she had gone, Susan began quickly, "Oh Pen, I've been rummaging in the attic this week, and I do want you to come and see what I found. I have two lovely old colonial mirrors. Both of them were broken, not the glass, only the scroll work of the frames, but Larry mended them beautifully for me. I put one in the living room downstairs and one upstairs, in mother's room."

"That's great," responded Pen, very much interested, "and what else did you find?"

"I got an old brass bowl that turned out wonderfully good-looking after it was cleaned and polished, and a whole lot of old dishes, and a fire screen. At least, the frame for one, and we're going to make something to fill it. But the best find was a big old trunk that was pushed way back under the eaves. We had a hard time getting it out, and it was simply covered with dust and dirt. Most of the things in it were damaged in some way, but about all of them can be fixed up without much trouble.

There's a wonderful old blue and white quilt, the heavy woven kind they used to make—just exactly what we need for mother's four poster, and it looks beautiful. I do want you to come out to see everything. Then there were some old real linen hand-woven sheets, some with holes and some yellow with age. But we're going to dye them and make table covers and bedspreads and things like that out of them. They'll be lovely for next summer."

Susan paused and shook back her thick hair. She sat on the edge of the table swinging her legs, her hands in the pockets of her knickers. Pen looked at her and smiled for sheer pleasure of seeing her there. Susan was so healthy, so absolutely genuine and unaffected in her manner, so entirely forgetful of herself and her appearance! After Evelyn's society it was a relief to look at and to listen to Susan.

"Let's see," went on Susan, "what else was there, Larry?"

"You forgot the brass candlesticks and the curtain stuff," prompted Larry obligingly.

"Oh, of course," resumed Susan, "there was just what I hoped for, some sweet old colonial chintz. Wasn't that wonderful?"

"Yes," said Pen, "but goodness, after that, you certainly ought not to throw cold water on our hopes of finding a treasure. There wasn't

any reason why you should find all those things—just what you wanted—in an empty house!”

“Got you there, Tommy!” laughed Larry.

Susan laughed too, good-naturedly.

“Well, I don’t aim so high as you people,” she said, “but hereafter I’ll help you look for the secret staircase and the treasure and anything else you want. Come on, Larry, we’ve got to go back. I told mother we wouldn’t stay long. I just wanted to see how you were, Pen.”

“Oh, I wish you could stay longer,” said Pen regretfully, “you’ve just been here a minute or two.”

“Really,” said Larry, imitating Evelyn’s lofty manner, “but I hardly think it’s the correct thing, Miss Poindexter, to stay more than a few minutes when it’s an *informal* call, you know.”

“But you will come Saturday, won’t you, Pen?” insisted Susan, giving Larry a push toward the door, “and do tell them here that you’re going to stay all night.”

“If Aunt Emily is better,” said Pen, going with them to the door, “I’d just love to.”

The two Grahams had scarcely departed when Evelyn returned to the kitchen. Finding they were gone, she immediately began to talk about them.

“They certainly look poor. I never saw such

outfits. Haven't they any Sunday clothes at all?"

"I don't believe so," replied Pen briefly.

"I'd like to see the inside of that old Juniper James house," went on Evelyn, in a studiedly careless tone, "always have wondered what it looked like."

Pen smiled to herself. She knew what had caused Evelyn's sudden curiosity concerning the inside of the Juniper James house.

"Well," she replied, "you'll have to walk two miles if you want to see it."

Evelyn tossed her head. "Oh well, I've walked that far before, I guess." She sauntered out of the kitchen and Pen put the last touches to tidying up, wondering just when Evelyn would find it worth walking two miles to see Larry Graham's handsome face again.

As it happened, Aunt Emily did not get better immediately. She developed a severe case of grippe, and Pen was obliged to stay out of school all week. Evelyn took her new dress to Miss Sophie Chase to finish, and while the result did not entirely please her, she felt able to go to the party without any qualms.

After Evelyn had left the house on Friday evening, Pen sat alone beside the oil reading lamp in the Atkinsons' stiffly-furnished living room. Mrs. Atkinson was better, but Pen knew

there was no chance of getting away the next day. She was almost too tired to care very much. Too tired to be anything but conscious of how weary she was and how lonely and depressed. Next week was the first of November and very soon after that, the snow would come. An early winter had been predicted, and if the prediction were fulfilled, Pen knew her visits to the Grahams would become still more difficult. Walking in snow without snowshoes was a long, tiring process if you tried to get any considerable distance.

"I wish I had snowshoes," she thought longingly, and wondered if the Grahams had them.

As she sat there, she heard steps on the piazza and immediately afterwards a knock at the front door. She hurried to open it and found, to her surprise, Susan Graham and Mr. Reeves standing there.

"Hullo," smiled Susan, "it's a wonderful moonlight night, and Don and I felt like taking a walk, so we tramped over here. Can't you come back with us to-night and stay over Sunday?"

"Oh," exclaimed Pen, delighted to see them, "do come in and sit down. I'm all alone. Uncle Lije and Evelyn are both out, and Aunt Emily is still in bed. I'm afraid I can't come

out to see you at all this week. I'm awfully sorry."

"Oh dear," exclaimed Susan, "I think it's too bad. Why can't your cousin take care of her mother?"

Mr. Reeves said nothing all this time but seemed occupied with his own thoughts.

"There's really too much for one person to do," explained Pen, "with the cooking and cleaning and waiting on Aunt Emily. Evelyn can't cook anyhow."

"Well, I'm awfully disappointed," said Susan frankly. "I wanted you to come and hear what we're reading. Don found some old books up in the attic and one of them is the diary of a man who used to live in the house years ago. Just think, he lived in that big house all alone except for an old cat he had——"

"Oh, how queer!" exclaimed Pen, her eyes wide with surprise and amusement. "Why, that's like Dexter's story about it. Listen, isn't this funny?" She took out the letter and read them the story of how the Golden Orchard got its name.

Both Susan and Mr. Reeves listened with great interest.

"That," murmured Mr. Reeves approvingly,

"is an exceedingly pleasant little tale. I like it."

"But wasn't it funny how Dexter happened to make up just this kind of a story, with a man and a cat in it?"

"A strange coincidence," agreed Mr. Reeves. "Now all we have to do is find the old chest he mentions, and then we'll know whether the gold was really buried under the trees and really turned the apples into russet apples."

"Well, of course, that never did happen," said Susan in her matter-of-fact way, disregarding the twinkle in Mr. Reeves' eye, "but the diary is interesting, Pen, and you'd love to hear it."

"Susan likes it because the writer gives practical details on just how he prepared his meals and how he cooked potatoes, which were a favorite dish of the cat's."

"What was the name of the man who wrote the diary?" asked Pen.

"He was a Juniper James, too, an earlier relative of the last Juniper James who sold the house forty years ago," replied Mr. Reeves, and added, "Come on, Susan, we must go."

"To sea, to sea! The calm is o'er;
The wanton water leaps in sport,
And rattles down the pebbly shore;
The dolphin wheels, the sea-cows snort,

And unseen mermaids' pearly song
 Comes bubbling up, the weeds among.
 Fling broad the sail, dip deep the oar;
 To sea, to sea! the calm is o'er.' "

"All right, Don, I'm ready," said Susan, "but if you ask me, the mermaids aren't the only 'unseen' things. There weren't any dolphins and sea-cows snorting near shore when we came along."

"No, I suppose not, dear Susan," replied Mr. Reeves sadly, "and I don't suppose you could *pretend* you saw them either, could you?"

"No, I couldn't," said Susan decidedly, "it's a lovely moon, though, and that's enough for me to look at. Put your coat on, Pen, and come out as far as the gate and look at the moon. It's just exactly full to-night."

Pen gladly went with them out into the quiet, clear October night. As they stood gazing at the big silver moon riding so proudly, high up in the starry sky, Mr. Reeves softly recited Southey's poem:

" 'How beautiful is night!
 A dewy freshness fills the silent air,
 No mist obscures, nor cloud, nor stain
 Breaks the serene of heaven;
 In full-orbed glory yonder moon divine
 Rolls through the dark-blue depths.
 Beneath her steady ray
 The desert-circle spreads
 Like the ocean girdled with the sky.
 How beautiful is night!' "

His deep musical voice spoke the words with an almost reverent intonation. The beauty of it sank into Pen's soul and without quite knowing just why, she felt tears come to her eyes.

"Well," said Susan, after a short silence, "if you can't come to-morrow, come next week sure, won't you, Pen?"

CHAPTER IX

PEN RECEIVES AN "UNBIRTHDAY PRESENT"

"THEY say we'll have snow for Thanksgiving," remarked Mrs. Atkinson, "and after that we'll have continual winter. Oh dear, I dread it, all the bad walking and the water freezing in the pipes and all the carrying of coal and—" She continued on in the same doleful strain until Pen felt as if she couldn't stand another pessimistic word.

Although her aunt had come downstairs again before the next week-end, Pen could not get away long enough to tramp out to the Golden Orchard. And none of the Grahams appeared again in Megamoc. Pen, remembering Evelyn's reception of Susan and Larry, did not wonder.

In spite of the fact that Mrs. Atkinson on the following Saturday still considered herself too ill to allow Pen to remain away all afternoon, Evelyn was able to attend a football game without any pangs of conscience. Pen was so used to this kind of happening, however, that she

took it quite for granted and stayed at home as cheerfully as she could. But it was impossible not to think with longing of the pleasant noise and bustle in the Grahams' house, the crackling open fire, Susan's cheerful voice, and the happy atmosphere of peace and friendliness which they radiated.

It was lonely in the Atkinsons' house too that afternoon with no one but Aunt Emily to talk to. Pen sat at the window of the living room, after the work was done, staring rather drearily out into the bare, cold-looking November afternoon, and wondered what Susan was doing. The more she thought about her, the more she liked Susan Graham. It seemed to her that she could easily become fonder of Susan and find in her a more congenial and satisfactory friend than almost any girl she had ever known. Even Janet Brown and Lucie Forrester did not attract Pen so strongly as had Susan in the short time she had known her. Pen still missed Janet, but was almost surprised to find, upon examining her thoughts honestly, that if she had a choice between spending a week-end with Janet and one with Susan, she would prefer Susan—and this without reference to the added attractions of the Juniper James house and the rest of the

Graham family. It was tantalizing to have Susan so near and yet so far, especially when Pen knew she was welcome at the Grahams' any time she could get there.

She wriggled and sighed restlessly, longing for the relief of tramping along the shore and open country, feeling the cold wind blow in her face, and swinging along happily with the pleasant goal of the Grahams' interesting home in her mind. It had been a hard two weeks. The first seven days she had been kept at home entirely, and though Aunt Emily was better the second week, Pen had hurried straight from school to the house every day and worked very hard making up her lost lessons. She was now feeling the result in a deep depression and weary discouragement.

But before the day was entirely over, several pleasant things happened which greatly cheered her. The first was that Uncle Lije brought with him, when he came to his usual early Saturday evening supper, a queer, interesting-looking package for Pen. And to her great joy, this mysterious and unexpected package contained a pair of real, honest-to-goodness snow-shoes! So excited and happy was Pen at this answer to her wish, that she was scarcely able to read the message which was enclosed with

them. It was in Dexter's handwriting and read:

"They gave it me," Humpty Dumpty continued thoughtfully, as he crossed one knee over the other and clasped his hands round it, "they gave it me—for an un-birthday present."

"I beg your pardon?" Alice said with a puzzled air. "I mean, what is an un-birthday present?"

"A present given when it isn't your birthday, of course."

It seemed to Pen that she could not put her precious new snowshoes down long enough to get supper or even to eat it. Now, so far from dreading the coming of winter, she was anxious for a rousing snowstorm to arrive as soon as possible. She sat quietly at supper, her mind wandering in the future and ate her baked beans and brown bread without tasting them.

Suddenly, however, her attention was drawn back to the present. Aunt Emily and Uncle Lije were discussing a letter which had arrived that day and which was connected with plans for Thanksgiving. Evelyn, who had come in late, just as supper was getting under way, was exclaiming, "Oh, let's go to Cousin Bessie's. The Trimville High always has a dandy Junior Prom Thanksgiving night, and Everett Weaver said he'd take me if I came over. Their dances are lots more fun than ours."

“Well, I don’t see how we can go and stay overnight when your Cousin Bessie has only one spare room and a couch extra. If you slept on the couch, Evelyn, where could Pen sleep?” demanded Mrs. Atkinson, knitting her brows over the problem.

“Oh, heavens!” cried Evelyn carelessly, “why can’t they fix up another bed somehow or other? We never get anywhere and I do think we might go just the same.”

“Well, I’d certainly like to,” admitted Mrs. Atkinson, “for after being sick, I declare I don’t look forward to a lot of fuss roasting a turkey and having all the work of Thanksgiving dinner here. Still I don’t see how we can go.”

Pen had a sudden inspiration. She spoke up quickly.

“Oh, Aunt Emily, why don’t you and Uncle Lije and Evelyn go to Cousin Bessie’s and let me spend Thanksgiving with the Grahams? I’m sure they’d have me if I asked them. They’ve already said I should come any time and stay overnight, too. There isn’t room at Cousin Bessie’s, and I don’t see where I could sleep except on the floor.”

“But—do you really want to, Pen?” asked Mrs. Atkinson, and her tone was kinder than Pen had heard it for a long time. “I know Cousin Bessie likes you and is glad to have

you come. You've been real good about staying home and doing a lot of extra work while I've been sick. I don't want you should think you're forced to go to strangers for your Thanksgiving." But even as she spoke, the relief in her voice at this solution of the problem was quite evident to Pen.

"Oh no, Aunt Emily," she cried earnestly. "Really, I'd love to go to the Grahams'. I know Cousin Bessie is good to me when I go there and I wish you'd tell her I appreciate it just the same even if I shouldn't go for Thanksgiving."

She stopped, finding herself dangerously near to tears. The snowshoes had made her wonderfully happy, and now Aunt Emily's unexpected softness was almost too much for her composure. Pen was quickly touched and invariably responsive to a kind word.

Evelyn stared at Pen and with a little malicious smile asked, "Are there any other Graham boys as good-looking as the one who was here that Sunday?"

Pen flushed but answered calmly, "No, there aren't! Larry is the best-looking in the family. Blair isn't much to look at and he's rather disagreeable too."

"Oh well," remarked Evelyn, "funny how the quiet girls like you always get the worst

crushes on handsome fellows. And Larry Graham is heaps better looking than Ingham Forrester, and goodness knows you ran after *him* so everybody talked about it."

"Better not say too much along that line, Evelyn," put in Mr. Atkinson, mildly teasing. "Sounds to me a mite like it was a case of sour grapes. I never saw *you* objecting to the society of any likely young feller round these parts. Let Pen alone for a change."

"Oh, Pa, you make me tired," muttered Evelyn, but she did not continue her unpleasant remarks. Pen, during Mr. Atkinson's intercession, had regained her self-control, which Evelyn's words had threatened to wreck. After all, what was the use of trying to combat Evelyn's ill-natured spite? Pen had experienced the hopelessness of it time and again, and was on the road to learning that an indifferent silence was her best weapon.

And so it came about that Pen spent Thanksgiving with the Grahams in the big house in the middle of the Golden Orchard. Although there had as yet been no snow, she took her snowshoes with her. She could not bear to be parted from them, and according to Uncle Lije, who was a weather prophet well-known for his reliability in forecasting changes of atmosphere

and coming of storms, there would very likely be a snowfall before Pen returned.

She left Wednesday afternoon at the same time the Atkinsons departed for Trimville, and had been instructed to return to Megamoc on Friday afternoon.

Full of a pleasant sense of freedom and anticipation of a happy two days, Pen set out joyously on her long walk. She could not very well hurry because she was carrying her snowshoes under one arm and a package containing her night things and a few bags of nuts and raisins and dates which Uncle Lije had given her, under the other. But she walked with a joyous stride and did not feel the weight of her burdens.

She reflected happily that this was going to be so much better than the family party in Trimville. In spite of Mrs. Atkinson's unusually kind words that Cousin Bessie would welcome her after a fashion—a not particularly cordial fashion, to be sure—Pen hated the stuffy little house. It was full of relics and family mementos and all the kinds of bric-a-brac which Pen instinctively most disliked. She hated sitting around all day and listening to the family discussions and endless gossip which took place at Cousin Bessie's from morning to night.

When she arrived at the Grahams', her cheeks were red with cold and glowing from her long walk. The welcome she received was as warm and satisfactory as she could have wished, and every minute her happiness at being there grew deeper.

"Come upstairs and leave your things," said Susan, "and then we'll make candy and frost the fruit cake and crack nuts. Oh, I'm glad you're here, Pen, it makes it so much more festive. We hardly ever have company way out here. . . . Isn't my room nice and warm?"

Susan's room had two windows facing south and one to the west. It was large and looked very bare, with only a wide old wooden bed, a chest of drawers and one chair for furnishings. The woodwork was white and the wall paper covered with faded little sprigs of pale brown which had probably once been blue. There were no curtains of any kind, and the deep window seats were bare of cushions. The only covering on the painted wooden floor was a small strip of old blue carpet beside the bed. Like all the rooms in the main part of the house, it had a fireplace with beautiful white paneled woodwork around it.

"Wait till next spring," said Susan, looking critically but not discontentedly around the cheerless room, "I'm going to fix this up so

you won't know it. I'm beginning already to gather things into a corner of the attic for it. I want to make the whole change at once. It's awfully bare now but at least there's heat coming out of the register so it isn't uncomfortably cold here. You ought to go in Don's room. That north wing is awfully hard to heat and his room is icy."

They went downstairs to the big, old-fashioned kitchen where they found Mrs. Graham occupied in cleaning a couple of fat chickens.

"We couldn't afford a turkey," explained Susan, "so we're going to have roast chickens instead. Mother, you do look tired. Why don't you go and sit by the fire till dad comes home? You've done enough for one day. Let me take care of the rest."

Mrs. Graham did undeniably look tired. Indeed, Pen thought she must be ill, so heavy were the dark circles under her eyes, so colorless her lips, and so worn the expression of her face.

"I think I will, Susan," she replied meekly. "I'll go right now; if you'll just put the chickens away in the pantry for me."

Susan's lips set in a straight, tight line for a moment after Mrs. Graham left the room. Then she said somberly, "I just know mother isn't well, but I can't find out what's the mat-

ter. She's suffering, I'm sure, and it worries me to death. I wish I could get her to see a doctor——”

“Look at what I've got,” interrupted Pat, rushing into the kitchen at this moment and holding out a book for Pen's attention, “it's got lots and lots of lovely names in it.”

“Don found it in the attic,” explained Susan, “it's an old city directory of Boston. Pat's having a great time with it.”

“Hullo, Pen,” exclaimed another voice, and in came Larry bringing a huge armful of kindling wood. “Yep, Pat's got real cause to be thankful this year, eh, Pat? And just to make a happy Thanksgiving for her doll family, she's giving them each a present of an extra middle name. If you feel you haven't as many as you need, Pat'll be tickled to death to give you half a dozen. She wants me to adopt at least two more—Leander and Leicester.”

“Pat is partial to alliteration,” explained Susan smiling.

“Oh, there's lots of lovely ones beginning with P,” said Pat eagerly, “that would be nice with *your* name, Pen. It's awful if you haven't any middle name. Why, Penelope Poindexter is just only two names!”

“You can put some in one of your Thanksgiving notes for Pen, Pat,” said Susan, and

then she explained. "We all write each other notes to be opened at special times to-morrow. It's just for fun, of course, but Pat loves it and we've always done it, so it's got to be quite an elaborate affair. Here, Larry, you and Pen can crack nuts while I'm making candy and frosting the cake."

"Hasn't Don come back yet?" inquired Larry, setting to work with his usual vigor and sending nut shell chips flying all over the kitchen.

"Yes, he came in while you were down cellar chopping wood," replied Susan. "Blair came with him. They're both in the living room now. Don's probably copying poetry into notes for us. Oh, one of our rules, Pen, for Thanksgiving notes is that each of us has to write a note to every one of the rest telling him or her something nice we think that person has done or said or some way they've improved in the last year—just anything that we really and truly believe. And after dinner, we read them aloud. Larry," turning to him, "I've got a lovely one for you this year!"

"Don't forget it's got to be true, Tommy," returned Larry grinning. "It's one of the rules of the game you can't use your imagination in these notes."

"I know it," retorted Susan placidly. "Don

would say you needn't worry because I never do use my imagination anyway."

"Well, I think that's an awfully nice thing to do," remarked Pen. She tried to imagine such a proceeding in the Atkinson household and found it quite impossible. "What else do you do on Thanksgiving Day?"

"Why," replied Susan, "there seems to be a regular program we follow out every year. It might seem queer to any one else but it wouldn't be Thanksgiving Day to us unless we did. At breakfast, we each have to tell some one thing we're thankful for. We usually go round several times, as long as breakfast lasts. And every year regularly Don gives us each a dollar—just to be sure we'll have *one* thing to be thankful for, he says. It's lots of fun because he always gives it to us in a different way, either before breakfast or during breakfast. Sometimes we have to hunt for them. Then, after breakfast is over and the beds made and all the work done that has to be done, we all go for a long walk so we'll be sure to be hungry for dinner. All except mother and Pat because they can't walk so far as the rest of us."

"Why tell her the whole program, Tommy?" put in Larry suddenly. "Why not let it be a surprise? Pen may not be so glad she came if

she hears all the rigmarole she's in for beforehand."

"Oh, I think it's going to be more fun than any Thanksgiving I ever had," said Pen earnestly. "I always have wanted to get out before dinner for a long walk, but I've always had to stay home and get dinner and help entertain relatives. And they never do anything except sit around in the house and talk. My, you don't know how glad I am to be here!"

"We're glad too," said Susan, and in passing she put her arm around Pen and hugged her affectionately.

After supper, which was a jolly meal with little ceremony but much talk and laughter, the Grahams all gathered in the living room.

"Let's write our Thanksgiving notes first and have the regular reading afterwards," suggested Susan. "We may be too sleepy to feel like writing later."

Mr. Reeves looked up from his book and smiled. "But I'm not going to read poetry to-night, *Susanna mia*. It's something else more to your taste and oughtn't to make you sleepy."

"All reading makes me sleepy," returned Susan frankly.

"I think it's a good idea, too, to write your notes first," said Mrs. Graham. "We must

make sure to have them done, and Pat will be trotting off to bed soon. I found a lot of scraps of paper up in a closet, Susan, to-day. Look in the table drawer, I put them there. They're just the thing you need."

Susan quickly and efficiently distributed paper and pencils and they all gathered around the big table which held a bright reading lamp in the center.

"We're going to write notes to Pen, too," announced Larry, "so *she*'ll have to write 'em to us."

"Guess she'll wish she hadn't come," said Blair. "I don't see why we have to do it anyhow. Silly business! We're getting too old and grown-up."

"No one is ever too grown-up to need encouragement and to appreciate recognition of his or her efforts to make life go on more smoothly and easily," remarked Mr. Graham, who had drawn up his chair with the rest. He spoke in his usual mild tone but Pen felt under his words and manner a certain firmness which carried weight. Blair did not answer back. He brought up a chair noisily and sat down with a great deal of fuss and disturbance.

"Don't know what to write," he muttered, lolling back in his chair and sticking his pencil into his mouth at a jaunty angle.

"Well, don't joggle me," protested Pat, looking up from her writing. "I should think it would be easy for *you* to write 'bout *us*, but I can't think of anything nice about *you*, Blair Montgomery Graham, so now."

At Pat's frankness, there was an involuntary ripple of laughter from the rest, but Mrs. Graham said quickly, "Pat, dear, that's not kind. You stop and think quietly, and you'll find in a minute something will pop into your head, something Blair has done to make things pleasanter for you."

Pat did not look convinced but she kept quiet, and soon all the pencils were scratching away busily.

"I wish Gardner were home," remarked Mrs. Graham later when the notes had all been folded, carefully addressed and given to Mr. Reeves to take care of until the next day, "I'm afraid it's going to snow before he gets here."

"Hope it does snow," exclaimed Susan, "Pen, we'll all go snowshoeing if there's only enough snow. I'll show you our old snowshoes to-morrow. A friend of Don's, a guide up in the woods of Canada, made them for us—they're like real Indians'."

"Oh, I'm so glad," said Pen. "I can hardly wait to try mine out. I think it *will* snow to-

morrow. Uncle Lije predicted it and he's usually right."

Mrs. Graham went to bed early, saying she had a headache, and it was decided by the rest of the family to omit the reading aloud for that evening. Mr. Graham and Mr. Reeves took to their books, Pat went off with her mother, leaving Larry, Blair, Susan and Pat to amuse themselves with a game of cards. They played until Gardner arrived at ten o'clock, and then Susan brought in glasses of cider and a plate of cookies. After a little more talking and poking at the open fire, they finally found themselves quite sleepy enough to be ready for bed.

Pen and Susan were soon snugly curled up in the big wooden bed, where Susan dropped off to sleep with surprising promptness. Pen lay awake listening to the howling around the house and the peculiar swishing and soughing of the pine boughs swaying outside their windows. The murmur of the ocean and the voice of the whistling buoy seemed strangely near at hand. Pen felt as if it would not surprise her to wake and find that a storm had driven the sea up and up, until it beat at the foot of the high brick walls surrounding the Golden Orchard. She stared out into the darkness of the big room where the windows were just

dimly discernible in the gloom and felt a cold breath on her cheek from the night wind blowing in. She wondered if she would dream of the secret staircase. Strange creaks and queer cracking sounds came at intervals from various parts of the old house.

She slid farther down into the cosy warmth of the covers, glad to hear Susan's placid breathing so close beside her and for the knowledge that there were other people quietly sleeping in the big dark house. One need not feel afraid or lonely or . . .

The next thing Pen knew she was awakened by a shrill, "Happy Thanksgiving! Let me get in bed with you, Susan!" and opening her eyes sleepily, she saw Pat climbing in over the edge of the high bed.

CHAPTER X

BLAIR'S STUMBLE AND WHAT IT LED TO

PEN had been away over night so few times that she found every minute of her visit exciting. The very novelty of helping get breakfast in some one else's kitchen was fun. Washing dishes, making beds—all the monotonous routine housework which certainly was nothing new to Pen—did not seem a tiresome duty at all. She enjoyed every instant of the Graham household tasks, and at breakfast her very first response when it came her turn to tell something she was thankful for, was, "I'm thankful because I'm spending Thanksgiving *here*."

"Where's the usual annual contribution, Don?" demanded Blair. "I haven't got any special Thanksgiving hymn to sing without it."

"Maybe Don thinks you consider yourself too grown-up for that," put in Larry, winking at the rest of them, "if you're too grown-up for writing the regular Thanksgiving notes."

"I'm never too old to use money," returned Blair flippantly. He looked expectantly at Don who was calmly eating his breakfast and con-

tinued, "Anyhow, if we're gonna have it, I hope we get it easier than last year."

They all laughed, and Susan explained to Pen, "Last year, Don told us we'd each find our dollar bill in some book which had an appropriate title for it. Well, we've got just loads and loads of books, you know, and it really wasn't easy to find the money at first."

"What were some of the names of the books where you found the money?" asked Pen.

"I don't remember them all, but there were *Treasure Island* and *All's Well That Ends Well* anyhow."

Mr. Reeves got up suddenly.

"Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I'm expecting a guest for breakfast and I must go to meet him and usher him in. He's bringing something, a little present for each of you, I presume."

He left the room, and Pen and the younger Grahams stared at each other very much puzzled. Mr. and Mrs. Graham smiled wisely, amused at the eager curiosity in their faces.

"Where did Don go?" demanded Susan.

"I heard him go down cellar, I think," cried Larry.

In a few moments there were sounds indicating that Mr. Reeves was in the kitchen again, and after a short delay during which Pat's eyes

nearly popped out of her head with excitement, the door into the dining room opened. At first, they could see no one. Then Pen, whose chair was nearest the kitchen, glanced down at the floor.

"Oh, look!" she cried, "it's a kitten! See, on the floor."

"Oh, goody, goody!" exclaimed Pat, and Susan, jumping up from her chair, picked up the little black kitten which was wandering about aimlessly, quite plainly undecided where to go.

"You darling," she cried, "I've been wanting a kitten ever so long. Don, where did you get it?"

Mr. Reeves came in. "That," he explained gravely, "is a descendant of the cat who lived with Juniper James and liked potatoes and warm islands in the Pacific."

"Ho," scoffed Blair, "like fun it is! I bet you got it down at that farmhouse beyond Kent's Crossing."

"Indeed?" said Mr. Reeves imperturbably, "you might ask the kitten. But if you get acquainted with it you'll probably find that he can tell you where the secret staircase is, and perhaps the treasure chest that was washed up by the sea."

"Oh, what's this tied to him?" asked Susan.

"Looks to me," remarked Mr. Graham, "as if that kitten had brought some of the treasure with him. He must be the real article."

Eagerly Susan untied a little cloth bag that was fastened to the kitten's back, and opened it. Inside, there were tiny paper envelopes addressed to each of them, Gardner, Blair, Larry, Susan, Pat and Pen. They contained the famous Thanksgiving Dollars.

"Oh, Don, but I'm more thankful for this adorable kitten than for the dollar," said Susan, hugging the squirming kitten lovingly.

"It must have been in the cellar all night," remarked Larry speculatively. "Funny we never heard it cry."

"Probably Don put it in that little vegetable closet in the end of the north wing. You'd never hear anything there. You could murder a man in it without any one hearing you," said Blair, enjoying Pat's look of horror.

Pat had earlier in the day shown signs of wanting to accompany the older members of the family on their morning walk, but the appearance of the kitten quite reconciled her to staying at home. They left her contentedly sitting on the rug before the open fire, her attention divided between the lively ball of fur and the precious new book from which she was

selecting a rich profusion of names for the kitten.

"Gee," exclaimed Larry, "Pat'll want to load the poor cat up with a string of names as long as its tail."

"Long as all its nine tails, put end to end," added Gardner.

"Nine lives, you mean," said Susan literally.

Mr. Graham, Mr. Reeves, Gardner, Blair, Larry, Susan and Pen all started on their walk soon after breakfast. As they left the house, Susan exclaimed, "Oh, isn't it dull and cloudy to-day! Look at the sky over the ocean. It's almost black."

"I'm sure that means snow," said Pen, "that's the way it always looks before a storm."

"Hope we have a real one," cried Blair.

" "The sun that brief December day
Rose cheerless over hills of gray,
And darkly circled gave at noon
A sadder light than waning moon, ' "

quoted Mr. Reeves.

"Say the rest of it, Don," said Larry, "it just fits this day." And so Mr. Reeves obligingly recited the whole of *Snowbound* to an appreciative audience.

They tramped briskly off, through fields and

woods, sometimes along the shore, sometimes along lonely country lanes where the ground was frozen into hard ruts. Pen was able to act as guide at points where there was doubt as to which direction to take next, and she enjoyed it immensely. She found herself telling the Grahams many of the names she and Janet had made up. They never laughed unkindly as Evelyn undoubtedly would have done.

After they had walked for an hour, they turned back toward home.

"Oh, look," exclaimed Susan, "it's beginning to snow. See, there's the first flakes."

Sure enough, a few thin little snow flakes came floating lazily down out of the heavily overcast sky. Soon came more and more, falling faster and faster, until they were walking in a real snowstorm. It was extremely pleasant, however, for the snow was very dry and fine, and while it was pretty cold, there was almost no wind. By the time they reached home again, there was a thin white film on the ground and the country had been transformed into a winter landscape. Faster and thicker fell the snow, until the air was full of soft feathery whiteness.

They found Pat and the kitten looking earnestly out of one of the front windows, both pairs of eyes so solemnly round and excited

that it made them laugh to see their comical expressions.

It was pleasant to come into the house, after their long cold walk and feel the grateful warmth of the blazing driftwood fire and smell the fragrant odor of roasting chickens. Pen thought she had never been quite so hungry in her life, and she was quite sure that she had never enjoyed any Thanksgiving dinner so thoroughly. Usually she was too tired from Aunt Emily's nagging fussiness and the elaborate meal preparations to eat with any degree of pleasure. But the Grahams' dinner seemed to get itself with almost no effort. Nobody appeared rushed or nervous over anything, and the whole atmosphere was peaceful and unrestrained. That didn't mean it was stiff or formal in any way, Pen noted, nor that it was entirely without noise and bustle. There was plenty of both laughter and good-natured joking.

After dinner was over, and the dishes washed, came the gathering in the living room and the reading of the special Thanksgiving notes, a ceremony which Pen at least found of great interest. She also found it embarrassing when her turn came to read out loud the notes she had received from the Grahams, for they had not been stingy in their compli-

ments. Their kind words filled Pen with a warm happiness that she remembered a long time after Thanksgiving. Susan's note expressed her admiration for Pen's cheerful acceptance of the extra work her aunt's illness had made her. Pen, sadly conscious of the effort it had often been not to be rebellious at her lot, felt that in the future the memory of Susan's appreciation would make things easier for her.

Pat's note made them all smile. "Dear Pen: I think you're the nicest girl I ever knew next to Susan, even if you haven't more than two names. I think it was very kind of you to make me those lovely paper dolls."

The reading of the notes was followed by a discussion of what names to give the new kit-ten, but nothing was definitely decided. After they had talked and joked about it a while, Larry suddenly jumped up and said, "Come on, let's have a hunt for the secret staircase and the hidden treasure. Pen's never had a chance, maybe she'll be the lucky one and find it."

Pen got up eagerly, and the rest followed promptly. Here was one game that had not yet lost its novelty. Even Gardner laid aside his book to join in the hunt.

"Shall we go each alone, or all together, or

in twos?" asked Susan as they stood in a group at the living room door, undecided how to begin.

"It's Pen's party," said Gardner, "why not let her lead the way and all of us go with her to help or protect, whichever becomes necessary."

"That's a good idea! Come on! Princess Pen at the head of her devoted forces," cried Larry, waving his arm and bowing low before Pen.

"Well, I hardly know where to begin," exclaimed Pen. "Let's see, suppose we start in the downstairs rooms and work up. The Royal Exploring Party will now march to the south."

The boys whistled a stirring march tune, and they tramped noisily across the wide front hall. Both the southeast room and the one back of it, which was under Susan's room, were empty except for a few packing cases and some odds and ends. Pen had no very definite ideas of how to hunt for secret passages, but she decided that one knocked at the walls and if they sounded hollow, one tried to find a secret spring to release the opening which was masquerading as an ordinary panel.

They did this very thoroughly in both rooms, finding to Pen's bewilderment that almost everywhere they rapped, a hollow sound re-



"LARRY SAT APPARENTLY LOST IN THOUGHT."

sponded—but they never found the magic spring.

The oak wainscoted room in the south wing fascinated Pen—it had an air that spoke of by-gone romance. Surely it was the logical place for a secret staircase. But she was finally obliged to leave even this promising field without having discovered anything, and the tapping and feeling performance was repeated in all the rooms on the second floor—with the same disappointing results.

“Children,” called Mrs. Graham, “if you’re going up to the attic, will you please put on sweaters or coats? There isn’t a bit of heat up there.”

Gardner and Blair went on up to the attic, while Pen and Larry sat down on the steps to wait for Susan’s return. Pat, who had carried the kitten with her in one of the capacious pockets of her much-bepocketed little dress, now took it to the window on the staircase landing to look out at the snow.

Larry sat apparently lost in thought, a more serious expression on his face than Pen had ever seen there. She had noticed all day that he was quieter than usual, and that his eyes followed Mrs. Graham about watchfully, sometimes with a brooding somberness that aroused Pen’s curiosity. What was he thinking about?

Suddenly Larry looked up and catching her intent gaze, reddened and looked guilty as if he had been caught doing something wrong.

"It's really no use hunting any more," he said, rather hastily. "I told you I've been all over the place and never found a darn thing. That Juniper James bird just didn't have that kind of a mind. And I don't believe he had any money either. What's the use of looking any more?"

"Oh well, it's fun," replied Pen, "and I'm not ready to give up yet—at least, not till I've tried everywhere myself. You know, secret places are always hard to find, else they wouldn't be secret. Usually, in books anyway, people just stumble on them by accident——"

There was a crash from the attic above them.

"Somebody stumbled then," exclaimed Larry, jumping to his feet, his gloomy expression disappearing. "What ho, up there! Who's busting up our best attic furniture? Any one hurt?"

"All serene," called back Gard, "just Blair trying to open the scuttle."

Larry sat down again, and Pen looked at him curiously. Dexter's words came to her "Has it occurred to you that he may be an adopted child with money left in trust for him?" But why didn't Mrs. Graham tell

Larry and the rest of the family if this were the case? Surely that would be the simplest way out, and then they could sit down and decide calmly what it was best to do with the money if Larry still did not want to go to college.

"This is the last time I'm going to do any secret staircase hunting," remarked Larry suddenly. "This ends it so far as I'm concerned."

Just then Susan came upstairs again, and they all went on to the top of the house. As they entered the attic, Gard exclaimed excitedly, "We've found something! When Blair slipped and fell down from the scuttle, he stumbled over that box and fell in under the eaves and knocked a hole in the floor or something——"

"Trapdoor here," came in muffled accents from under the eaves. Blair's head and half his body were out of sight in the shadows as he lay flat on the floor.

"What's he doing?" demanded Pat, with a disapproving expression on her funny little round face, "he'll get his clothes nice and dirty, lying on the floor, won't he, Susan? Make him get up."

But in a moment Blair backed carefully out

into the light, his face flushed and dusty and his hair tousled.

"Got any candles up here, Susan?" he asked, "I found a little trapdoor in the floor back under there, and I've been hanging in head first and feeling around, but it's so dark I can't tell whether it's a big place under there or what it is."

"I left a candle up here yesterday," replied Susan, and she got it for him quickly. They all squeezed in as close as they could while Blair carefully waved the lighted candle about in the dark hole in the floor.

"Oh, isn't this thrilling!" murmured Pen. Even Susan looked excited.

"Can't see where it goes," muttered Blair, "it's so deep. Oh golly, here's a rope tied to a beam under this side of the hole." He squirmed forward as far as he could and balanced perilously on the edge of the opening.

"Oh, let *me* see, too," cried Pat, pushing suddenly in against Blair, "I want to see too——"

There was a shout from Blair and almost before they realized what had happened he went crashing down into the hole, candle and all.

Susan and Pat gave a startled scream, and Pen felt as if her heart had stopped beating

for a moment. Her mouth was dry and she couldn't utter a sound.

"Blair," cried Susan, recovering herself first, "Blair, are you hurt?"

"I'm afraid I killed him," sobbed Pat, panic stricken.

But to their relief, they heard Blair's voice muttering in the pitch dark hole. Then he said, "I'm all right. Banged my head and got bumped some. Give me a match, will you? I fell on the candle and put it out. I can't see a thing."

Larry struck a match quickly and held it down into the hole. Blair's head was several feet below the floor level and by the flickering light they could see blood on his face as he looked up.

"Gee, that's a nifty little dungeon hole," remarked Larry whistling. "Here, catch," and he tossed down the box of matches.

Blair caught them and stooping, groped for the candle. After he had lighted it and looked about him, he exclaimed, "Golly, what do you know about this! It's a room! There's furniture here, too."

"Hold on, we're coming down," cried Larry excitedly. He swung himself over the edge, and dropped lightly to the floor below, followed by Gardner. Susan and Pen and Pat, crouched

around the edge of the opening, watched breathlessly.

"Why, it *is* a room," exclaimed Pen. "Oh, my, look, there's a cot and some chairs——"

"I don't see what part of the house it's in," puzzled Susan, "I want to go down in too, Larry. Let us, please. Look, we can slide down this rope. It's not very far."

In a moment they were all gathered in the dark little room, peering curiously about in the dim light of the one flickering candle flame. The room was long and narrow, with a low ceiling. At one end was a small fireplace and at the other a narrow white door.

Pen stared at the fireplace and then exclaimed, her voice trembling with excitement, "*That's* the fireplace I saw in my dream! I'm just sure it is."

"Oh, Pen, really?" cried Susan incredulously. "How could it be?"

"Look for the secret staircase," exclaimed Larry, "that'll prove it." They crowded forward, Blair ahead. But Gard pulled them back decisively. "Here, wait! This is Pen's party. Let her go first."

Pen hesitated, examining the narrow panel at the right of the fireplace.

"I can't seem to remember just how it worked," she said, shivering with cold and ex-

citement, "but it seems to me I simply pushed it and it opened."

She laid her hands on the dusty wall and pushed. The next moment a shout rang out from the Grahams who were clustered close about her—the panel had moved!

Pen pushed harder, and back slid the panel until a narrow black opening was disclosed. The candle was brought forward and,—
"There's your secret staircase!" cried Larry,
"now who was right, Tommy?"

"Let Pen go first, she discovered them," commanded Gard, again holding Blair back.

"We'll wait here till you come back and report where it goes to," announced Susan.

"Well, if I call, please come to my rescue," exclaimed Pen with a nervous giggle.

She looked into the black opening to the narrow stairs which was barely wide enough for her to get through and felt ruefully that she wasn't so anxious for the honor of being the first one after all. But she hated to admit that she was afraid, and gathering all her courage, she started down, feeling her way carefully, step by step. To her surprise, there were only three stairs, and then the passage became level. A few more steps, and it turned at right angles, all the time so narrow that her shoulders nearly touched the two walls. It was a queer feel-

ing, creeping along that way in the pitch darkness like a blind person and never knowing what she might not touch as she felt ahead with her hands.

Suddenly she heard voices ahead somewhere, and saw a tiny gleam of light from what seemed to be a crack along the floor. The next instant she came up against a blank wall and realized that she had reached the end of the passage. She stopped and listened. The voices seemed to come from a lower level. She recognized them as belonging to Mr. and Mrs. Graham. Mrs. Graham was saying, "But it would be so terrible if he came back after all these years and found Larry gone! We simply *must* keep him."

"But suppose Leverett doesn't come for another year—suppose he doesn't ever come," she heard Mr. Graham reply, "how'll you explain the fact that there isn't any money?"

Pen realized suddenly that she was overhearing something not meant for her ears, and felt her cheeks turn scarlet in the dark. She twisted about cautiously in the narrow passage and hurried back without exploring or examining farther.

She found the Grahams waiting for her patiently. They had already drawn lots to decide who should have the next chance, and Larry

had won. For a moment Pen had an impulse to try to stop him—Larry ought not to overhear any such conversation as she had heard. But Larry was so eager to go that he scarcely listened to Pen's story of the way the passage went, but plunged down the steps quickly. To Pen's relief, he made a great deal of noise, calling back to them and pounding the walls at various points as he went along. Surely the Grahams would hear him coming.

Just as Pen was trying to explain to the other where the passage had ended and they were puzzling as to what its object could be, they heard a shout from Larry calling to them. Gardner and Blair started down immediately.

"Let's go too, Pen," exclaimed Susan. "Come on, Pat, you take hold of my belt, and we'll see what's happening."

Much to their surprise they found the end of the passage open, a little square door only a couple of feet high, and Larry's voice beyond it, saying, "What do you know about this? It opens into one of the cupboards in mother's room!"

Sure enough, to their amazement they were crawling one at a time, into the little cupboard in the wall over the door in Mrs. Graham's room. Larry and Gard swung them down safely to the floor, and then they stood

around, chattering and talking in great excitement.

"You ought to have seen mother's face when I stuck my head out," exclaimed Larry gleefully. "The cupboard door happened to be open, and there was a little streak of light along the crack in the passage. I was trying to peek through it when I pushed the panel aside and there I was in the cupboard."

"We heard queer noises coming from somewhere in the wall," explained Mrs. Graham, "and we were looking around trying to decide what it could possibly be, when suddenly Larry appeared."

"Lucky you didn't have the cupboard full of things," said Gardner.

"Nobody'd think of using it for anything they needed often," remarked Susan, "it's such an inconvenient place to get at. Certainly there are plenty of closets in this room without it."

"Come on," cried Blair, "let's get a lantern and take it through the passage again. Let's see what the secret room looks like with more light in it."

Mr. and Mrs. Graham and Mr. Reeves now joined the exploring party, and all of them, with the help of a short ladder, were soon gathered in the queer, little secret room.

"The old chest that held the gold pieces ought to be around here somewhere," said Mr. Reeves. "Surely we'll have to find something with a tinge of romance to it——'Sails of silk and ropes of sandal, such as gleam in ancient lore.'"

"Well," remarked Mrs. Graham, "that's a beautiful chest of drawers. If you can get it out, I'd rather like to have it downstairs somewhere. And these two chairs also. They're real antique."

The cot bed had only a mattress on it with no bedclothes and they found nothing of any great value aside from the furniture. The door at the end of the room opposite the fireplace, opened into a shallow closet with shelves containing a few old dishes, a candlestick and some old books.

"Well," said Susan, "I can't say I think so much of your wonderful secret room. I'm going—it's terribly stuffy here. I don't like it."

Gradually all except Blair and Larry left the attic and returned to the living room where they sat in front of the open fire and discussed the exciting events of the afternoon.

"Why on earth should any one want a passage like that from the attic to mother's room, I wonder?" mused Pen.

"That room looks as if it were a hiding place for somebody. Maybe the people used to have relatives in the British Army during the Revolution, and even if they were Americans, they'd help them," said Susan.

"Your English, dear Susan," murmured Mr. Reeves protestingly, "is almost as mysterious and involved as the architecture of the Juniper James house!"

"Oh, well, you know what I mean," returned Susan, "what I don't understand is why people built a house expecting to have use for such secret rooms. How did they know?"

"I don't know," exclaimed Pen, who was staring into the fire intently, "but I don't care much either. I'm just glad it's there. There must be a story connected with it, and we can always make up our own even if we don't know the real one. I just had the feeling this house had to have a secret passage somewhere."

"Well, I hope now that we've settled the matter, there won't be so much of this snooping around all the time hunting for things," said Susan emphatically, "but I suppose it'll just make the boys all the more interested in poking into the walls."

"Queer there's no mention in Juniper James' diary about that passage way," said

Mr. Reeves thoughtfully, "but probably his cat disapproved of it."

They continued to discuss the matter, speculating on it from all points of view and trying to draw diagrams of the plan of the house to show where the passage was located. Finally Blair and Larry returned, and some one mentioned supper.

"Let's have it here in front of the fire," exclaimed Susan, "shall we, mother? I'll make sandwiches and tea and we can pop corn and have nuts and candy for dessert."

"That would be fine, Susan," replied Mrs. Graham, starting to get up slowly.

"Oh, don't you come, Mrs. Graham," begged Pen. "Susan and I can do it all easily. Please let us."

She was glad that Mrs. Graham accepted the suggestion without argument, but Susan looked worried again as they prepared supper.

That meal stood out a long time in Pen's memory. Its picnic-like atmosphere, and all the good-natured teasing and fun that went on, fun that included her as she was never included in any of Evelyn's good times, made a deep impression on her. She was excited too by the scrap of conversation she had overheard, and every spare second her thoughts returned to it. What did it mean? Surely at least it definitely

established the fact that Larry was not a real Graham. Pen felt a pang of regret at finding this out. She realized that she had unconsciously hoped that after all Larry might not be an orphan like herself. But perhaps he wasn't an orphan! Who was Leverett and what did it mean about there not being any money? Pen kept stealing glances at Larry and at Mrs. Graham all evening, so full of interest in the mystery that she could scarcely think of anything else.

Larry was noisy in spells, and then he would sit back in the shadows quietly. Once Mrs. Graham spoke to him, "Larry dear, did you have too much Thanksgiving dinner? You are so quiet all of a sudden."

Larry moved quickly forward and cried cheerfully, "Not a bit, mother. I can eat a lot more. Let me have that popper, Gard. I haven't had a turn at it yet."

By the time the last of the informal supper was over and cleared away, it became Pat's bedtime. She was with difficulty persuaded to separate from the kitten which had been her constant companion since its arrival.

"Let me take it to look out of the window at the snow just once more," she begged, and at the mention of snow, the rest of the family flocked to the windows also.

"Oh good!" exclaimed Susan, "just look how high it is on the window sills! It must have been snowing hard all afternoon and evening."

"Still going strong," added Mr. Graham. "I see where Gard and I have to leave earlier than usual to-morrow morning to get our train."

"Better go on snowshoes, dad," cried Larry. "If it's very deep, it won't be any cinch getting to the crossing."

"No place to leave the snowshoes," put in Gard, "but I wish we could."

"Why, I'll go over with you," returned Larry promptly, "and bring them back."

Why was it Larry, and not Blair, who always offered to do nice things, wondered Pen.

"Oh, Don, if you're going to read out loud," said Susan, when they returned to the fire, "do read the nice snowy parts from *Lorna Doone*." Larry seconded the motion, and Mr. Reeves cheerfully complied.

Pen enjoyed the reading tremendously. She sat on a cushion on the floor in a warm corner leaning comfortably against Mr. Graham's chair. It was pleasant to watch the flames and the glowing embers and little clusters of sparks crawling mysteriously up the sooty bricks at the back of the chimney—and know that out-

side there was a howling wind and cold wet snow swirling and driving across the lonely, open countryside. She listened fascinated to the descriptions of the deep snow in *Lorna Doone*, which Mr. Reeves read in his musical voice.

Across at the other corner of the fireplace sat Mrs. Graham with Larry and Susan at her feet. Her face was back in the shadow but Pen could see the faces of Susan and Larry, lighted by the ruddy glare from the fire, as they too stared dreamily into its glowing depths. Once, as Pen glanced up at them, she saw Larry turn his head quickly and press his lips against Mrs. Graham's knee.

After Mr. Reeves stopped reading, the conversation came back once again to the subject of hidden treasure.

"Well, it's a satisfaction to have found the secret passage," said Mr. Graham with his pleasant quiet smile. "Now we can go back to earning our money more contentedly, knowing that we can't expect to get rich quick by means of Juniper James' abandoned treasures."

"Of course," remarked Mr. Reeves, "there's always that smugglers' underground tunnel to the shore that Blair's going to find for us."

Opens somewhere from the cellar, doesn't it?" he inquired, turning blandly to Blair.

"I don't know," retorted Blair. "Haven't found it yet."

"What good would it do you if you did find it?" asked Susan. "You'd better not to try to do any smuggling, or you'll land in jail some day."

"He's expecting to pick up some of the gold the old pirates spilled from the brimming chests of Spanish coins, on the way to the shore," put in Mr. Reeves smiling.

"Rot!" said Gardner, yawning widely. "Probably won't find a thing more than was in the secret room up in the attic."

"You'd get more tangible results, Blair, if you put the same amount of thinking and manual labor into a job," said Mr. Graham, "at the rate I understand you've been working, you could earn possibly all of eight or ten dollars a week—no mean treasure, young man!"

All of this teasing, which was entirely good-natured, was not too graciously received by Blair.

"Oh well," he muttered, plainly showing that he resented their joking, "I might as well give up and go to work. Even if I did find any hidden treasure, I suppose I'd be expected

to give it up to Larry. He's the only one in *this* family that gets any chance."

There was a moment of silence during which Pen for one felt extremely uncomfortable.

Then Mr. Graham said quietly, "I would suggest that you go to bed, Blair."

When Blair did not move, he added with emphasis, "*Now.*" Suddenly Blair got up and flung himself out of the room. There was another uncomfortable silence.

Finally Mr. Reeves remarked, "Well, I'm sleepy. The combination of snowstorm and Thanksgiving is too much for me."

"I know what makes *me* sleepy to-night," said Susan, "it's that long walk this morning and the excitement of exploring and then all the food I've eaten and the open fire. Come on, Pen, let's go to bed, too."

After they were in bed, Susan said, "My, wasn't Blair a pig! That's the kind of thing he's always saying. He and Larry had a row last week. Poor mother hates it so. It's silly of Blair, too. The only thing Larry has more than the rest of us is that money to send him to college, and it's not his fault, and it's surely not mother's or dad's. Larry wanted to go away last week when they had the row, but mother simply begged him to let it pass, and

made both boys promise to behave. And that's the way Blair does it."

"It's too bad," said Pen. She was strongly inclined to tell Susan about the conversation she had overheard. And yet, did she have the right? Surely the Grahams, who were older and wiser, knew what was best.

"Do you think there'll be enough snow for snowshoeing to-morrow, Pen?" asked Susan.

"Oh, yes, I'm sure of it," returned Pen.

"Won't it be fun!" said Susan drowsily.

But to Pen's enthusiastic agreement there was no reply, for Susan had dropped off to sleep abruptly in the middle of the conversation.

Pen lay awake a while longer. Already she was beginning to feel sad at the thought of how nearly her visit was over. She hated to have it end. As she lay there, she heard the rest of the family come quietly upstairs, and after a little walking back and forth and subdued bustle, doors were finally closed and the old house became silent in its nightly slumber.

Pen felt herself gliding into a delicious sleep a little later on, when suddenly a noise in the hall outside their door roused her. A board creaked loudly. Then silence. Then another creak. Again silence. Pen, her heart hammering against her side, was convinced that

some one was creeping past their room toward the back stairs, pausing between each carefully placed step.

Who could it be?

After lying there stiffly and hardly daring to breathe, she finally tried to scold herself into a more sensible frame of mind. Probably one of the family going to the bathroom or downstairs to see to something—of course, they would go quietly in order not to disturb any of the rest.

But another thought suddenly occurred to her. Could it be Larry running away from home as he had threatened to do? How terrible if he should set off alone on a wild stormy night like this! What ought she to do? Should she wake Susan?

But perhaps after all it had been her imagination. The old house was full of queer unaccountable noises at night as all old houses are. And soon Pen, growing sleepier and sleepier, suddenly dropped into the middle of a dream. It seemed to be snowing popcorn and when she tried to put on her snowshoes to go and find Larry, she found they were made of chocolate which broke to bits before she could take a step.

CHAPTER XI

PEN'S MESSAGE TO DEXTER ALAN

THE next morning, much to her relief, Pen heard Larry's voice and from the window before she was dressed, she saw Mr. Graham, Gard and Larry start off for the early train. So Larry had not run away!

By the time breakfast was over and the house put in order, the clouds had parted and bright sunshine was turning all out of doors into a dazzle of white and blue.

"Children," said Mrs. Graham, "there's no reason in the world why you should stay indoors a minute longer. Run along now and try your snowshoes."

"Will you promise not to do any work while we're out?" asked Susan hesitatingly.

"No, I shall certainly make no such rash promise," returned Mrs. Graham promptly, "but don't worry, Susan, I'm not going to clean nor do any heavy work. Possibly some baking and a little mending."

"How do you feel, mother?" asked Larry,

coming up and putting his arm around her shoulders affectionately. Pen had noticed that the Grahams were not accustomed to bestowing caresses as freely and spontaneously as the Forresters had, and she felt, rather than actually saw, that Mrs. Graham was touched by Larry's hug.

"I feel splendid to-day, thank you," she said quickly. "I think we had a beautiful Thanksgiving, and that gave me a rest. Pen made it a regular holiday for me by the way she has helped Susan with the work. Now run along into that glorious sunshine and get up an appetite for lunch."

Considering it was the first storm of the season, there had been a quite respectably heavy fall of snow, and plenty to make snowshoeing possible. Mr. Reeves, Blair, Larry, Susan, Pen and even Pat started forth to tramp across the trackless white stretches.

"Oh, Pat," exclaimed Pen delightedly, "I'm going to make a picture of you and paint it for a Christmas card. Doesn't she look lovely against the white snow, Susan?"

Pat was indeed a picture. She wore a scarlet tam on her dark curls, a dark green reefer, scarlet mittens and scarlet wool socks which came up over her knickers.

"Every year it seems as if the first snow

were whiter than I'd ever before seen it," remarked Pen.

"Isn't it fun to go where no one's walked before," exclaimed Susan gleefully. "Just look back at our path. Nobody keeps on a straight trail at all."

At lunch Mrs. Graham smiled at the sight of all the scarlet cheeks and at the hearty appetites.

"I wish father and Gardner could have been with you and had the walk, too."

"Well," said Mr. Reeves, when lunch was started, "any one going exploring again to-day or do we feel we've found all there is to find?"

Pen, thinking of the incident with Blair the previous evening, rather wondered whether any one would care to start arguing on the subject. Blair scowled, but Larry answered, "No more hunting for me. I think it's all bunk. Come on, Blair, mother wants us to shovel a path around the house and down to the front gate."

Blair's scowl deepened. He seemed to hesitate. Then, without a word, he followed Larry to the hall and a few minutes later the scraping of snow-shoveling could be heard.

The afternoon passed only too swiftly for Pen. She and Susan and Pat and Mrs. Graham gathered in the living room and enjoyed a

quiet time talking, sewing and playing with the kitten. After much discussion, it had been voted to name the kitten "Thanksgiving Donation," although it must be recorded that this did not meet with Pat's favor. She had selected "Jeremy Joseph Jaffrey Judkins." This seemed to her to have the proper ring of dignity to it. The fact that "Thanksgiving Donation" had already been abbreviated into the even less dignified and undeniably less euphonious name of "Hank" was almost too much for Pat's patience. As for the kitten, it played as merrily and paid as little attention when addressed by one name as by another.

At last, Pen, who had put off her departure as long as she could, announced that she must be thinking of leaving.

"Not until you have some hot cocoa and cookies," said Susan, jumping up and hurrying to the kitchen. "You can wait fifteen minutes longer, Pen. I won't let you go off for that long walk home till you've had something to eat."

"It's only four-thirty," remarked Mr. Reeves, who had sauntered in just in time to hear the last of the conversation.

"Oh, is that all? It's so dark already I thought it was later," exclaimed Pen, "though

I guess I ought to get home fairly early anyhow to open up the house."

"When will your family be back?"

"Why, Uncle Lije, of course, had to come back to Megamoc this morning on account of the store, but he was going home at noon and start the furnace and kitchen fires. I don't believe Aunt Emily and Evelyn will arrive until just before supper, but I want to have everything ready for them. It's not much fun to come back from a visit and have to start right in working."

"Huh," grunted Blair, "is it any worse for *them* than for you?"

Blair had addressed so few remarks to her that Pen was almost too surprised to answer. Before she could think of an appropriate reply, however, Susan called her to the kitchen to help bring in the cocoa.

"I'm going to walk home with you, Pen," announced Larry, as they sat eating and drinking.

"Oh, thanks," said Pen, "I'd love to have you."

"I'll go along," added Mr. Reeves.

A queer expression came into Larry's face. He looked down, stirred his cocoa vigorously and said, "Oh, don't bother, Don. No need for both of us."

"That's all right," returned Mr. Reeves calmly, "I'd like to."

Upon this, Larry showed unmistakable signs of embarrassment, and Pen wondered why he was objecting to Mr. Reeves coming with them. After a moment of silence, Larry looked up, smiled broadly and said, "Don, you're a good old scout and I like you heaps, but just to-night I can do without your esteemed company. In other words, your offer to accompany us is gently but firmly declined."

Every one looked astonished at this, Pen not less than the others. Larry, crimson to the roots of his hair in spite of his offhand manner, added hastily, "I've got something I want to consult Pen about. Christmas isn't so far off, you know."

"Gee," muttered Blair scornfully, "what a sick excuse! Christmas! I bet he's got a crush on Pen."

"Then we're rivals," said Mr. Reeves, smiling and managing by his friendly, sensible tone to take all the cheapness out of Blair's words and to dispel Pen's momentarily growing embarrassment. She was grateful to him for his unfailing tact and kindness.

The invitation to come again which the Grahams pressed upon Pen before she left was so cordial and hearty that she found it harder

than ever to go. But she at length gave Pat her last kiss, took a final regretful glance around the big living room with its cheerful fire, and hurried out into the dark, cold winter afternoon.

Just before they reached the gate, Larry said, "Hold on a second, Pen, I'll be right with you."

She saw him turn off and tramp over to one of the spruce trees whose lower branches were pinned to the ground by their burden of heavy snow. He stooped and seemed to be feeling for something. In a moment he came back, carrying something which Pen a little later, when her eyes became more used to the dark, made out to be a large leather brief case. He did not explain it and Pen, as they tramped off in silence, grew more and more puzzled. Why had Larry not wanted Mr. Reeves to come? What was he carrying? The real answer never occurred to Pen, in spite of the fact that the night before, the mysterious creaking footsteps had almost immediately suggested the thought that Larry might be running away.

"Pen," said Larry, speaking hurriedly and with an irrepressible note of excitement in his voice, "I want you to do something for me, please. I'm not going back home to-night, and I want you to take my snowshoes to your house

with you and sometime, if you can, return them or let Don go and get them."

"But, Larry," exclaimed Pen aghast, "where are you going? Do they know you're not coming back?"

"They will when they find my note. I left it upstairs," returned Larry briefly.

Pen was terribly upset, for she knew how anxious the Grahams were to avoid this very thing. Her thoughts raced wildly. She felt she must do what she could to prevent Larry from actually running away. But she shrank from the effort. It was so hard to know what to say! After a moment of silence, Larry started to speak, "Pen, for Pete's sake, won't you try to make mother and Susan see that I'm doing the right thing, the best for everybody? I don't want the stupid old money, and I don't want to go to college. Well, so long as I'm home, that money has to be used for my education. Well, if I'm not there, then the money has to be dad's and mother's to use some other way. Blair and Gard need it so much more than I do. Anyhow, just so long as I stay, there will always be that same trouble. I just won't stand it any longer. I want to travel and I'm going to."

"Oh, but Larry, couldn't you wait until—

until spring anyway?" asked Pen lamely, hardly knowing what to say first.

"What's the use? I almost went away last summer and then didn't because mother made such a fuss, and then when we got in the Juniper James house and started to think about this secret treasure business, I got the fool idea that if I stayed a while longer, maybe something would turn up. But I know now that it's silly to expect to find money that way. The only way to settle this business is for me to leave and get way off out of reach. Then, as soon as they *know* I mean it when I say I won't go to college, they'll see there's no use trying to make me."

"But, Larry, have you got any money? Where will you go?"

"I've got enough to get to New York," replied Larry, "and there are always vessels sailing from there, loads of them. But look here, Pen," he added anxiously, "don't you tell them where I've gone! I've said in the note that I'll write in a day or two and that they're not to worry. I'm strong and healthy, and lots of fellows get kicked out into the world when they're younger than I am."

"Yes, I suppose so," agreed Pen doubtfully, "but, oh dear, Larry, I wish you wouldn't go. They'll feel so badly!"

"I know that, but I just can't help it," returned Larry grimly. "I've simply got to go, Pen."

What could she do? Desperately Pen tried to think of some way to keep him, but she was so upset and excited and unhappy all at once that it seemed as if her brain refused to work. One idea did come to her. Should she tell Larry the conversation she had overheard? If he knew there was no money, there would be no reason for his going away. And yet, how could she use information which the Grahams, for reasons of their own, were keeping secret? And perhaps there was some other meaning to what they said which she did not know. What right had she to interpret their remarks and pass along her version to Larry? No, there must be some other way out.

"What train are you going on?" she asked finally.

"Six-fifteen to Boston from the Megamoc station, and any evening train I can make to New York," he replied, "I see where I sit up all night. Can't afford a berth."

"Oh, Larry," exclaimed Pen, to whom a sudden idea had come, "if you're really going to New York, I wish you'd do something for me, will you? I've got a package I've been wanting awfully to get to Dexter Alan and I hated

to send it through the mails because it's a hard thing to pack."

She hurried on, hoping desperately that he would not ask her what it was she was sending. She had no time to think up an appropriate article, and she did not want Larry to guess by her hesitation that she was plotting against him.

"Sure I'll take it, but don't forget you've promised not to tell I'm going to New York," responded Larry.

"Oh no, of course, I won't. But can't I possibly persuade you to stay, Larry?"

"No, you can't, Pen."

When they reached the Atkinsons' house, Pen left Larry in the garden while she hurried into the house. Her hands trembled so that she could scarcely get her snowshoes unstrapped, but she was deeply thankful to find the house dark. Aunt Emily's presence would have made things terribly difficult for her at this important moment. After she had lighted the kitchen lamp, she found a cardboard box, paper and string, all of which were neatly collected in a cretonne bag kept for that special purpose. Then with a stub of pencil from the shelf Pen hastily scribbled on a bit of wrapping paper, "Dear Dexter, *Please, please*, do something to keep Larry Graham there. It's

awfully important. Don't let him run away to sea. Make him write home from New York. Please do something. Desperately, Sammie."

What should she send? Looking around quite at a loss, Pen suddenly remembered there were a couple of mince pies left in the pantry on Wednesday. She remembered also how much Dexter liked them. In another moment she quickly packed the note with one of the pies, which she wrapped snugly in a clean old napkin, putting plenty of paper about it.

Then, carrying the neat package, Pen hurried out again to Larry. "Here it is, and thank you awfully, Larry. I'm ever so much obliged. Do go to see Dexter just as soon as you can to-morrow morning. I've put the address on the outside. My, I wish I were going to New York with you. It would be such fun."

"If I had the price for another ticket, I'd take you, Pen. Then you could deliver this package yourself," said Larry smiling.

Pen laughed nervously, hardly hearing what he said. Larry continued, "Well, the Megamoc station's about a mile from here, isn't it, Pen?"

"Yes, it's beyond the village. You can go by a good short cut through Forrest Lane and across the Forresters' place to Edge Road,

then turn to the right. You'll see the station light long before you get there."

"I guess I can find it all right. I know pretty much where it is, because I came over to inquire about trains last week. Well, good-bye, Pen, go out to see the family as soon as you can and as often as you can, won't you? They love to have you."

He hesitated, and looked at Pen for a moment as if after all, it did not come so easy to carry out his plan.

As for Pen, so closely had she identified herself with the Grahams in the short time she had known them, and especially during the past few days, that she felt as if she were saying good-bye to her own brother. Not only did she like Larry immensely, but his going off alone like that on a dark winter night to his long, gloomy ride seemed to her terribly lonesome and dreary. Just when other people were coming happily back to the snug warmth and cosiness of their homes!

Winking back her tears and trying hard to steady her quivering voice, she said, "Good-bye, Larry, good luck to you. And be sure to write very soon." She held out her hand, and Larry shook it vigorously.

"I will," he said. "Good-bye, Pen."

After he left, Pen hurried back to the house.

Mechanically she lighted the various lamps downstairs, started up the fire, set the table and began to get supper ready.

It was just as she heard Aunt Emily and Evelyn coming in the front door that an awful thought occurred to Pen.

Suppose Dexter did not open the package while Larry was there and so did not find the note? Suppose Larry simply left it at the door! Or if Dexter did open it, suppose he could not think up any scheme for detaining Larry!

Pen was in fresh despair. Dexter must be warned. He must be given time to concoct a plan. The only thing to do was to send him a telegram that evening. But how could she manage it? There were all sorts of complications to be overcome.

Pen, pondering desperately, gave such an abstracted greeting to her aunt and cousin that quite naturally Mrs. Atkinson remarked upon her lack of interest in her relatives' affairs and compared it unfavorably to her absorption in outsiders or "strangers," as she usually called the Grahams.

But the problems of getting money for a telegram and then of sending it in such a way that all Megamoc should not know about it so absorbed Pen that even Mrs. Atkinson's ag-

grieved remarks did not move her very much. She would have to beg the money from Uncle Lije who was soft-hearted and could easily be persuaded not to tell the rest of the family. But—the only telegraph office in Megamoc was in the railroad station, and Pen thought with disgust of gossipy old Rafe Collins who was well known as a disseminator of choice bits of news.

“There ought to be a deaf and dumb person in that place,” thought Pen despairingly. If she could only get to Trimville somehow that evening. But how? Trimville was half an hour’s ride on the train and more than an hour by trolley. One did not lightly “run over” to Trimville. Pen scarcely got there more than once or twice a year.

“Perhaps Uncle Lije can help me,” she finally decided as a last resort and hurried to put the finishing touches to the supper table.

Pen found supper that evening one of the most uncomfortable meals she had ever eaten. It was necessary to listen to Aunt Emily and Evelyn and appear interested in the account of their visit to Trimville. It was necessary also to inquire for Cousin Bessie and all the other members of the family. Moreover, it was necessary to give the story of her own Thanksgiving.

And all the while Pen wanted to think out a plan for getting to Trimville that evening!

She sat on the edge of her chair and ate scarcely anything. Would supper never be over? It seemed to her that they had never lingered quite so long over a meal before. Her seat was opposite the mantel on which stood a clock. In the middle of supper, Pen glanced up and saw that the hands pointed to twenty minutes past six. Larry was now on his train and really off! Oh dear, what would Susan say? What would poor Mrs. Graham do? Pen stared at the clock miserably, picturing the scene in the Juniper James house when they found Larry's note and realized what had happened. How long would it be before they began to wonder what was keeping him? And what would they do then? Would it occur to any of them to look upstairs and so find the note he had left?

"Pen!" exclaimed Mrs. Atkinson sharply, "for the land sake, what are you staring at the clock like that for? Why don't you answer me?"

"*Good-night!*" added Evelyn, "you look as if you were expecting to be electrocuted for something in a few minutes. What happened at the Grahams'? Didn't you have a good time?"

Pen turned crimson. She had started nervously at Mrs. Atkinson's words and now tried to get back her composure.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I—I didn't hear you, Aunt Emily. I was thinking of something else," she said lamely, realizing it wasn't a very good apology but quite unable to think up any other on the instant.

"Well, I just asked if the Grahams had a good furnace and whether the house was warm. Of course, it isn't necessary for me to know."

"Why, yes, they seemed to have a pretty good furnace," replied Pen, "but the house is so big and all the rooms are so big that it's hard to heat. They kept a fire in the living room fireplace all the time and it was always plenty warm there."

"Does that girl wear knickers all the time?" inquired Evelyn.

"Yes," returned Pen.

"Oh, by the way, I saw a friend of yours last night," went on Evelyn. "Janet Brown was at the Junior prom."

"Oh, was she?" said Pen absently, trying not to look at the clock. She felt a momentary twinge of conscience however, at being so taken up with the Grahams' affairs that she could not force herself to appear very much inter-

ested in Janet, whom deep in her heart she still loved.

"Does that Graham fellow dance?" asked Evelyn as they rose and started to clear the table.

"I don't know," replied Pen.

"Well, I thought maybe they'd like to come to the High School dance Christmas week."

Pen did not tell Evelyn that there was no chance of her getting handsome Larry Graham for the Christmas dance. She was too busy thinking about how to get the necessary warning to Dexter. The idea of a special delivery letter occurred to her, but she gave that up as not being absolutely certain of arriving before Larry did. No, a telegram, or rather a night letter, would be better. Pen had known almost nothing about telegrams until the previous summer, but then she had often been with Ingham Forrester when he sent night letters to his father. A night letter was the thing! It would be delivered early the next morning and would give her more words to explain the story than a telegram.

As soon as he got up from the table, Uncle Lije put on his coat and hat to go back to the store which he kept open several evenings a week. Pen saw her chances of getting him alone fade away. Under Aunt Emily's and

Evelyn's curious eyes she simply could not call him aside to ask his help. With a sinking heart she watched him leave the room, while she stood with clenched hands, ready to cry with disappointment.

And then a miracle saved her!

Uncle Lije turned at the door, hesitated a moment and then said, "Oh, by the way, Em, is it to-morrow or Monday that George is going to Boston 'bout that law business?"

"To-morrow," returned Mrs. Atkinson, "that's what he said this noon, I'm sure. Didn't he, Evelyn?"

"Guess so, but you can't prove it by me."

"Well, Great Scott," said Mr. Atkinson, "he oughter have that paper of mine. Why didn't he let me know? Now, how'm I going to get it to him? Why didn't he tell me? He's a no-count sort of stick."

"Lije!" exclaimed Mrs. Atkinson severely, "that's a nice way to talk, I must say."

"Oh, Uncle Lije, why don't you let me take it over to Trimville to him this evening?" exclaimed Pen, trying to keep her excitement from showing in her voice. It was her only chance. Oh, if they knew how much it meant to her! If only they would let her go!

"Well," said Mr. Atkinson doubtfully,

"what say, Ma? Guess I better let Pen go over with it, eh?"

To Pen's great relief, Mrs. Atkinson offered no objection.

"Get your things on and go along with your uncle right away. You can catch the seventy-three trolley, Pen," she said, "and you better stay over night there. Pretty late to come back to-night."

"That's a good idea," said Mr. Atkinson approvingly. "No place on those draughty old trolleys for her late at night. Likely to be full of a lot of bums coming home from Trimville, too."

At the store Mr. Atkinson gave her the documents to take to Cousin George, money for carfare and an extra dollar "in case you need it for anything."

"Oh, thank you, Uncle Lije," cried Pen gratefully.

"That's all right," said Mr. Atkinson, "don't bother to return it, Pen. I know you girls can always use a little money."

All the time Pen was in the old rattling, swaying, bouncing trolley which was slower than usual on account of the snow, she was busily planning the telegram to Dexter. The minute she arrived in Trimville, she made straight for the telegraph office, rejoicing in

the fact that the clerk was a severely impersonal, business-like, middle-aged man who spoke only what was absolutely necessary and made no attempt at any joking or familiarity.

When Pen's night letter was finally finished, it read: "Larry Graham is bringing you a package from me early to-morrow. Please think up some way to keep him in New York. It's awfully important. Don't let him know you heard from me. I'll write everything. Love, Pen."

She did not feel entirely satisfied with this but decided to let it go. Dexter could be relied upon to do his best. Perhaps he would get the Forresters to help him. At any rate, so long as he received the message, Pen felt sure there was nothing to worry about. Dexter would find a way. She drew a sigh of relief and started off to Cousin Bessie's, feeling suddenly very tired after the excitement and all her exercise in the open air that day.

Fortunately Cousin Bessie's was an early-retiring household, and shortly after the surprise of seeing her had been expressed and a little unavoidable conversation had taken place, Pen was tucked away in the big square bed. It had a thick soft mattress which was quite the most comfortable and luxurious she

had ever slept on. She was too tired to stay awake and enjoy it, however.

Just before she dropped off to sleep, she thought of Larry and the mince pie. Suppose its spicy fragrant odor should come through the wrappings! Why hadn't she thought of this before? If it did, would he guess it was only a plot to catch him? Would he deliver the pie—or eat it himself? Pen giggled hysterically, too tired to know whether she were thinking nonsense or not. But in the middle of puzzling over it, she suddenly slid into a deep, dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER XII

A LETTER FROM NEW YORK

MRS. Atkinson had instructed Pen to return to Megamoc in time for dinner at noon on Saturday. This meant that she must take the eleven o'clock car from Trimville. But she could not leave without calling on Janet, for a little while at any rate, and she left Cousin Bessie's as soon after breakfast as she could get away.

Janet was delighted to see Pen and begged hard trying to persuade her to stay over the week-end. And Pen, who was anything but anxious to return to the Atkinson household, particularly after her Thanksgiving visit, hated to have to refuse the invitation. Janet and she had a great deal to tell each other, and the hour which Pen had at her disposal flew by rapidly.

On the way home Pen again became absorbed in the important fact that Larry had actually gone away. She tried to imagine the meeting between him and Dexter. It seemed as if she could not wait to hear Dexter's re-

port. And yet she knew that there was nothing to do except wait patiently till Monday, for no letter could reach her before then.

She dreaded seeing any of the Grahams. It would be so hard to keep her promise to Larry. She hoped fervently that he would write immediately. But she decided to go out to the Grahams that afternoon even if it were embarrassing for she ought to try at least to make them realize somehow that Larry was all right. She could assure them that they would hear from him in a day or two and that they need not worry about him. It would be a lovely tramp out over the snowy fields, and Pen could not help feeling more cheerful at the prospect of using her beautiful new snowshoes again. It was another clear day, the air crisp and cold, and the snow was just right for snowshoeing.

When she reached the house, Aunt Emily was putting dinner on the table. She had met Uncle Lije as she was turning in at the gate.

"Where's Evelyn?" asked Pen. as they sat down to dinner.

"Why, she's gone off with a party of young folks," replied Aunt Emily. "She borrowed your snowshoes."

"She *did!*" exclaimed Pen. Evelyn calmly borrowed *her* new snowshoes? Her precious

snowshoes which she had hated to let out of her sight!

“Well, I hope you aren’t going to be selfish with your things, Pen,” remarked Mrs. Atkinson, who could not help seeing the dismay on her niece’s face.

Pen flushed unhappily. Evelyn never allowed Pen the free use of her possessions and had the situation been reversed, it would have been considered a great piece of presumption for Pen to walk off with Evelyn’s snowshoes in that airy fashion. Pen knew all this, and yet knew also that she could do nothing about it except to try not to feel too outraged.

“You know, your uncle is going to send off for a pair for Evelyn, too, so you can have yours all to yourself.” Mrs. Atkinson spoke as if it were really a favor on their part to allow Pen to consider her snowshoes her own undivided property.

Pen wondered if Evelyn had borrowed Larry’s snowshoes, too, and it did not surprise her when Mrs. Atkinson continued, “There was another pair out in the back entry, and Evelyn took those for Rhoda Martin. Where did they come from, Pen?”

“They belong to Larry Graham who came over to Megamoc to take the train. He’s gone off on a visit, and I said I’d return them for

him. I was going this afternoon," returned Pen, getting more and more indignant as her disappointment grew and yet wondering miserably if she were really being unreasonable and stingy.

By the time the dishes were done, however, Pen felt inclined to take a more cheerful view of the situation. After all, the snow was not so terribly deep. She had "arctics"—one could not go through a winter in Megamoc without them—and if she went down to the shore she could walk along the sand below the high-water mark where there was no snow. Aunt Emily left the house soon after dinner to attend a session of the Ladies' Sewing Circle and Pen was free fairly early in the afternoon. She could get to the Grahams', stay a little while and return in plenty of time to get supper ready.

When she turned off from the shore to cross the fields to the railroad track and so on up to the Grahams', she saw a solitary figure in the distance. It was Susan Graham.

Pen hailed her eagerly, and Susan promptly turned and started down in her direction. When they were within speaking distance, Susan cried, without any preliminary greeting, "Pen, did you know Larry never came home last night? I was just on my way over

to Megamoc to see you. We're all so upset and unhappy."

"Oh, Susan, I'm so sorry!" exclaimed Pen. "I wish I could help you. I was just coming over to see you."

"Did Larry tell you he was going away?"

"Yes," replied Pen, who had thought out what she would say. "He left his snowshoes in Megamoc at our house. I was going to bring them back, only Evelyn borrowed them, and mine too, while I was away. I had to go to Trimville for Uncle Lije last evening and stayed all night."

"Where has he gone?" demanded Susan. "Did he tell you?"

Pen colored. This was the hard moment for her, as she had anticipated, but she faced Susan bravely.

"Yes," she said. "He told me, but—but I had to promise him I wouldn't tell."

"Why, Penelope Poindexter!" exclaimed Susan, in wide-eyed surprise, "do you mean to say you know where our Larry's gone and you won't tell when we're all so upset and when mother's simply sick over it and we must keep him from getting far away?"

"Listen, Susan," said Pen earnestly, "I know it seems awful queer but I promised—I can't explain, but I had to. Just the same,

I'm sure you'll hear from him by Monday, and I'm positive Larry won't get far away, not before you have a chance to try to get him back. I can't tell you how I know,—at least, I can't tell you *now*,—but I'm sure of it. And if you knew as much as I do about it, you wouldn't worry, truly you wouldn't!"

"Well," said Susan doubtfully, "it sounds queer, but you're the kind of person, Pen, who makes people feel confidence in you. Can't you tell us anything more, Pen? Half of us think Larry went to Canada, and the other half think he went to New York. There are trains both directions from Megamoc in the evening, aren't there?"

"Yes," said Pen, and then she added candidly, "you know, Susan, I'm afraid if I'm not careful, I'll break my promise to Larry! So I think I'll go back home instead of going up to the house with you. After you hear from him, then I can tell you all about it. And really and truly, Susan, he'll be all right and you must persuade your mother not to worry."

Susan looked at Pen searchingly, as if she were trying to read her mind. "Well," she said, smiling suddenly, "I feel a whole lot better since I've seen you, Pen. But when can you come again?"

"I don't know," replied Pen doubtfully. "I've been away so much that I'm afraid Aunt Emily will take it into her head to get fussy again. But suppose I say Tuesday afternoon—if I can. If I don't get there by quarter past three, couldn't you come to Megamoc? I'm so anxious to hear all about everything."

"All right, I will."

"Good-bye, Susan. Give my love to every one and especially tell your mother from me not to worry. And tell her what a wonderful time I had with you Thanksgiving."

But when Pen was hurrying home alone, she did not feel quite so confident as her words to Susan had sounded. She was glad that she had been able to cheer her up a little, but suppose something had prevented her beautiful plan from being successfully carried out. After all, it was asking a lot to expect Dexter to find a way to mix into the personal affairs of a stranger and try to upset his plans. And yet, Pen decided that she could not help being hopeful, and until she had definite news, she would continue to have faith that Dexter had been able to devise some plan.

She was at home fairly early, glad of the chance to write a letter to Dexter, explaining all about Larry's departure. This letter she gave to Uncle Lije to mail the same evening.

The Megamoc High School was not far from the main street on which were the stores and post office, and at recess on the following Monday Pen hurried over to Uncle Lije's to see whether any letters had arrived for her.

"Here you are, Pen," he said. "Two for you. Getting lots of mail these days, eh?"

"Oh thanks, Uncle Lije," exclaimed Pen, eagerly taking the two envelopes and noting with a sigh of relief that one was from Dexter, one from Ingham Forrester. She sat down in a corner in the little room back of the store where Uncle Lije had his desk and kept his accounts, and hastened to open Dexter's letter.

"Dear Sammie: You're still at your Good Samaritan Saturday Evening tricks, I see, even if I'm not there. Your night letter came less than an hour before the subject of it turned up, and I certainly had to do some tall hustling.

"First, of course, I consulted Mr. Clayton, and together we got up an idea which, considering the shortness of notice we had, seemed pretty good to us.

"Larry, you had told me previously, was anxious to travel to see other worlds, and was specially anxious to get aboard ship somehow.

"Well, Uncle Terry knows a Mr. and Mrs. Ellsworth who are planning to go around the

world in their own little vessel, looking for adventures. It's quite the things nowadays, you know. They had been consulting with Uncle Terry about having Ingham and Cabot publish a book of their experiences which they plan to write as they go along. Naturally Uncle Terry couldn't know whether the Ellsworths would take Larry as one of their hands or not, but he said he'd inquire right away to see what chance there was. I was to get Larry into conversation and find out what he wanted to do and then suggest this as if it had just occurred to me. In that way we planned to keep him a day or two anyway till he heard the decision, and if the Ellsworths couldn't take him, then we'd try something else. But if the Ellsworths did say yes, why then, Larry was safe for at least a month because they won't sail till some time after Christmas.

“Having settled that much—bless Uncle Terry, he certainly does come up to scratch in an emergency!—I then called up the Forresters to see if I could get Ingham to come in town and show Larry the sights of New York. Ingham said he wasn't working at his job of official guide on Saturdays, but he'd come just the same, since it was a friend of Pen's. Of course, I warned him not to say he'd been sent for, but to pretend he had just dropped in.

“Well, Sammie, to set your mind at rest, it worked fine! There was certainly one thing that made it easy—Larry is such a likable fellow every one fell for him right away. He has a way of making you want to do things for him, and he looked a bit pathetic when he got here—tired and rumped and as if he found leaving home a trifle more lonely than he expected. He seemed very grateful when we got to the point where I said I’d call up Mr. Clayton and ask about the Ellsworths, and of course, while we were waiting to be called back again, I got him talking some more.

“In the meantime, Ingham came breezing in. Sammie, I suspect one reason for his agreeing so promptly to come was to see for himself ‘this here now Larry Graham’ and find out what kind of a piece of cheese his Penelope had been worrying about! Of course, he couldn’t help liking Larry, in spite of his good looks, and I could see they would be friends right away.

“Well, soon after Ingham came, Uncle Terry called up again to say he had talked to Mrs. Ellsworth whose husband was away until Monday or Tuesday. She herself said she knew they needed some one like Larry, and she would ask her husband the minute he got back so they could arrange an interview. In the meantime,

Uncle Terry said I was to be sure to make Larry stay with us over the week-end and as much longer as he wanted to. I gave Larry the message, but he looked uncomfortable and said he thought he'd better just get a room somewhere else. He hadn't intended to sponge on any of Pen's friends this way. But I persuaded him to. I guess, to tell the truth, he hadn't much money left over from the trip down here. I doubt if he had enough even to pay for a week-end anywhere.

"Ingham came in Daphne's car—there's no snow here, you know—and he took Larry off to show him round. They came back for lunch, and then Ingham insisted on Larry going out to Scarsdale with him. 'Gee whizz,' said Ingham decidedly, 'you've *got* to come. The Forresters would give me the deuce if they found out I'd been playing round with a friend of Pen's and didn't bring him home for them to see. They'll want to ask you all about her, you know, and any friend of hers is bound to get the glad hand.' Then he explained quite seriously how you had saved Phoebe's life last summer, and told a lot of other nice things about you, and how much they all liked you. Larry listened respectfully, but there was a twinkle in his eye toward the end. He went with Ingham, however.

“About dinner-time Daphne called me up and said they wanted Larry to stay over the week-end with them if I didn’t mind. That rather amused me—it sounded as if they took it for granted Larry belonged to me! Naturally I was glad to have him stay because I knew it would be more fun for him with a bunch of young people than sticking here with a cripple and a quiet elderly man. But I had Daphne get Larry to the phone, and after I’d talked to him a bit and told him to have a good time with the Forresters, I asked him if he were writing home that evening. He hesitated, and then said he’d rather wait till he knew definitely what he was going to do. I told him *not* to wait—that even if the Ellsworth business didn’t turn out, I was sure that Mr. Clayton could get him some other opening. Also that I had talked to Mr. Clayton again and he had offered to give Larry work in his publishing house to support him until the Ellsworths were leaving. Larry finally promised to write home right away.

“Jumping crickets, Sammie, I was glad to hang up after that conversation, I can tell you. Being tactful and diplomatic is a strain to any one who’s been so spoiled by others as I have been lately. I had to watch my step in order not to seem to be butting into his private affairs too much. It seemed to work all right, how-

ever. (Oh Dexter, thought Pen, of course, it worked! You'd say it so nicely, how could any one resent it?)

"And that's the story so far, my dear. Have I told you everything? If not, I shall have to wait until another time because this is about as long a letter as I can manage right now."

Pen drew a sigh of happy relief and satisfaction when she came to the end of the letter. How splendidly it had turned out! Dexter was a wonderful friend to rely upon in an emergency. And how good of Mr. Clayton to be so interested! Pen longed to be able to go out to see the Grahams right away and show them Dexter's letter.

She started to open Ingham's letter, but as she did so, her gaze fell upon the clock. Oh my, it was nearly twelve and recess would be over before she could get back to school. Stuffing both letters into her coat pocket she hurried back to school where she arrived late, but too happy to care. The last period was a spare one for Pen, and she was able to read Ingham's letter. As usual, it was not very long, but its contents made her smile.

"Dear Pen: Funny Felix saw I was writing to you and he barked twenty-one times.

Since you couldn't hear him, I'll translate it for you. *An Irish terrier may not be so much for looks, but he's often more faithful and affectionate than those Borzoi hounds.* Yours, Ingham."

Pen did not do much studying that final period. She was thinking of Larry and Ingham. A little smile came to her lips every once in a while at the thought of Ingham's letter. Nice old Funny Felix! He was such a sweet, funny, lovable dog! And Ingham! Why, so far as Pen was concerned, Larry was simply Susan Graham's brother.

While Ingham—well, Ingham was the first boy who had singled Pen out to be nice to her. Ingham had been her best friend all last summer. He had helped her through all the problems she had encountered in typing and sending off Dexter's book. Why, she and Ingham had grown to be such friends that no amount of handsome Larry Gramms could ever take place in Pen's thoughts ahead of Ingham Forrester. It was sweet of Ingham, but just like him, thought Pen warmly, to insist on Larry going home with him. How nice it was to know that Larry, fresh from the big-family atmosphere, did not have to spend a homesick Sunday in some dreary rooming house. She knew from

experience just how nice the Forresters could be to a lonely person. . . .

Suddenly it occurred to Pen that after all Tuesday was a bad day to have said she would go out to the Grahams. She had forgotten, in the midst of all the excitement, that Tuesday was wash day and she would be expected to stay home and iron all afternoon. How could she wait until Wednesday?

But it so happened that Aunt Emily had decided to take up and mend a section of the upstairs hall carpet, and she needed Pen's help for she herself was certainly not equal to getting down on her hands and knees to take out tacks and afterwards replacing the carpet. There was nothing for Pen to do but postpone her visit and stay at home.

Pen was amused, but not surprised, to find that Evelyn, having learned that Larry had gone away "on a visit" immediately lost interest in the Juniper James house and the Graham affairs.

On Tuesday two things happened. Aunt Emily had word from her Ohio relatives saying they could not come for their visit after all. And in the same mail came a letter from Aunt Hester inviting them all to Scotfield for the Christmas vacation. Uncle Henry's family had recently moved into a new house and in a

sudden burst of hospitality had decided to hold a house-warming at Christmas. There would be a number of other relatives, of course, and the new house, ample as it was, would be full to overflowing.

Pen's heart sank as she heard this news. It would have been bad enough to have Uncle Henry and Aunt Hester and the two children in Megamoc—to go to spend Christmas at *their* house would be even worse.

There would be no possibility of slipping away anywhere by herself. And helping with the housework, which in itself Pen did not mind for she was not lazy, would be far from pleasant under Aunt Hester's domineering directions. Pen remembered with a sigh the few occasions on which she had visited there—she had not been allowed to do the simplest thing without minute instructions, most of them entirely unnecessary.

"I'd rather go to Trimville than Scotfield," complained Evelyn when the matter was discussed at the supper table. "At least there's something to do in Trimville and there are the movies. Scotfield is just a country crossroads. I'd rather stay in Megamoc."

"Well, you're going to Scotfield, so you can just make up your mind to it," said Mrs. Atkinson decidedly. "I certainly couldn't refuse

when we have no good reason. I'll be glad to go myself, because I still don't feel any too well after that bad grippe attack I had. Everybody says it takes a long time to get over the effects of grippe, and I'm sure I nearly had pneumonia. You children can't understand, but I think you might be a little more cheerful about something that means less work for me. Wait till you've had a family and children and worked for years and years. You'll be glad when the time comes and you can sit back and take it easy a little."

Pen, who could scarcely remember a time when she had not done the greater part of the routine housework, and who felt that Aunt Emily with her small family and comfortable means had never had a really hard tussle with life, could not easily give the required sympathy, though she had tried to do so on other occasions. She sat feeling very much depressed, and so absorbed in wishing she had the right to accept money from Dexter for a visit to New York at Christmas that Aunt Emily rebuked her for her dreaminess. The tirade concerning Pen's increasing lack of interest in the affairs of her own family was beginning to get on Pen's nerves. It took all her self-control not to answer back, and of

course, her silence was simply fresh cause for criticism.

Thanksgiving had been such fun at the Grahams, thought Pen longingly, as she washed the dishes alone that evening, for Evelyn had gone off early to a rehearsal for the play which was to be given at the church's annual Christmas sale and supper.

Wednesday, when Pen got home from school, she hurried to finish dinner and start off for the Grahams. Just as she was leaving the house, Mrs. Atkinson said, "Did you find your letter, Pen? Your uncle brought it this morning. It's on the mantel in the sitting room."

Another letter from Dexter! Pen stopped in the wintry sunshine on the back porch, and hastily ripped open the envelope.

"Dear Sammie: Second chapter in the Life and Letters of Larry Graham! Uncle Terry got in touch with Mr. Ellsworth late this afternoon—and all is well! Larry is to go with them, unless Mr. E. changes his mind after interviewing him to-morrow. Larry starts to-morrow also to work for Ingham and Cabot, and he's already hunted up a hall bedroom not far from here. He absolutely refused to stay in the house here, and I think he's right, after all. I hope that he'll come over a lot, though,

for I like him, Sammie. He's a nice boy. Uncle Terry and I have both written to Mr. and Mrs. Graham to reassure them and to try to reconcile them to letting him go. It's so much healthier than for him to stay at home and be discontented, even if there were no question of any money involved.

"And speaking of money, Sammie, I wonder if you'd care to earn some, typing the manuscript of a book of one of Uncle Terry's authors? I thought maybe some of those stormy Maine winter days when you couldn't get out of doors, you might work at this thing. There's no great rush because they won't start printing it until next March. The Forresters said you could have their typewriter, and they're writing to Mr. Truman, who has the key to the house, to ask him to get it and take to your house. As soon as I hear from you, I'll have the manuscript and paper sent you. I think the pay is about fifty cents a thousand words. I don't know the length of this book but it's probably at least eighty or ninety thousand, possibly more. . . ."

"Why," thought Pen joyfully, "if I can do it before Christmas, I could earn enough to go to New York! Oh my, it seems too good to be true. Even if I can't get it all done in time,

perhaps Dexter could advance me some of the money.”

Pen hurried off almost too excited to think clearly. After the Thanksgiving storm there had been a few warm days which melted most of the snow and made snowshoeing entirely out of the question. The walking was very bad, and Pen, with Larry's heavy snowshoes strapped to her back, found the journey out to the Golden Orchard more tiring than she had yet known it. But she was so happy that nothing else seemed to matter.

She found Susan all alone in the kitchen.

“Why, where's every one?” she asked.

“Mother's sick in bed,” replied Susan, “and Don is up with Gard. We've certainly had a terrible time, Pen. Just one thing after another! Gard came home late Saturday evening after he'd been working in the store, you know, and he slipped on the ice crossing the track and fell down the embankment and fractured his leg. Don and Blair went and found him. Mother was worried because she had heard the train whistle and knew it was time for Gard to be home. Finally to make her feel better, Don took Blair and they went out and found poor Gard lying in the snow and trying to crawl home. Blair had to go off and get Dr. Blakeson from Megamoc, and after the

doctor got Gard's leg set and bandaged, he said it would be weeks and weeks before he could walk on it again. My!" and Susan drew a deep breath, "you can imagine with all the excitement over Larry going away, we were all upset! Then on Sunday mother got sick, and she's been in bed ever since. Pat's up with her now and Don's with Gard. I don't know what I'd do without Don! Oh yes, another piece of news—Blair's gone to work in a garage in Trimville. He started in Monday."

"Well, you *have* had an awful time," said Pen sympathetically. "I wanted to come out sooner but I couldn't. Tell me about Larry now."

"Well, come in and sit down by the fire," said Susan. "I've been on my feet since six o'clock this morning and I'm tired. We can talk in there. I don't think I have anything I must do this minute."

Pen felt like crying when she compared this visit to the last time she saw the Grahams. She recalled the room as it had been, full of cheerful, laughing people saying good-bye to her with cordial invitations to come again soon. She remembered exactly the way they had all looked at that last moment—Pat with the little furry kitten held up under her rosy chin; Gard back of Susan at the door, his hands on her

shoulders and his face against her thick curly hair; Mr. Reeves, with a gentle smile as if he were still amused at Larry's refusal to accept his company; Mr. Graham holding a large book with his finger between the pages to mark his place and his thin gray hair untidily ruffled; Blair leaning carelessly against the wall, his hands in his pockets and the usual sullen expression on his face; finally Mrs. Graham, lines of pain and weariness quite plainly visible on her face even in the dim light of the hall and her eyes following Larry's motions with an almost questioning intensity. Behind the little group had been the soft glow of the firelight. It had all looked so cosy and cheerful, so brimming with that spirit of companionship and peaceful home security which were especially appealing to Pen.

And now! Only Susan lying back in the big chair across from her. And not the sparkle of life and energy which had been Susan last time. For Susan was plainly tired and worried. In her knickers and shabby blue shirt, with her slender figure and her tousled short hair, now wilder than ever, she looked too young to assume the burden of keeping the big family fed and cared for.

"But isn't it a help to know Larry's all right anyway?" demanded Pen eagerly.

Susan's face brightened. "Yes, it's splendid. We got his letter Monday, and mother was awfully relieved, of course, although she still feels badly. But then we do miss Larry *terribly*. And with mother and Gard in bed and Blair and dad away, this place doesn't seem natural a bit. But now that we know where Larry is, you can tell us all about your part of it. Larry wrote us he took a package from you to Mr. Alan and that's how it all came about that he expects to have this wonderful chance to go around the world. Pen, Don says you sent the package to Mr. Alan just so Larry would be sure to go there, and he thinks you sent a message to him somehow. Did you, Pen?"

"Well, I couldn't think of any other way to keep Larry from getting far away," said Pen. "I couldn't persuade him to stay, so I did that instead and then telegraphed Dexter to try and keep him. Only you mustn't *ever* let Larry know, will you, Susan?"

"Of course not. Oh, Pen, it was dear of you to do that. And I can't ever thank you enough. Let's go up and see mother now. She'll be so anxious to hear about every bit of it. She's a little better to-day but Dr. Blakeson says she must be kept very quiet and not think of getting up for a while. She really ought to go to

a warm climate and have a complete rest. Oh dear, being poor is sometimes so much worse than other times. I say that we ought to take the money Larry wouldn't use for college—part of it anyway—and send mother and dad off to the south for the rest of the winter. But, of course, mother says it's impossible. I'm going to keep at her though till I do persuade her."

By this time they had reached the upper landing in the hall. A moment later they entered the Cupboard Room where they found Mrs. Graham lying in the big four-poster with Pat and her dolls and the kitten beside her.

She was plainly delighted to see Pen and eager to hear everything she knew about Larry. Pen told, as exactly as she could, all the conversation that had taken place between her and Larry on their walk to Megamoc and then read her Dexter's letter. Mrs. Graham was very much moved, and although Pen's recital of her own share in it all was modest enough, Mrs. Graham showed that she believed Pen had done something very praiseworthy indeed. The quiet earnestness of her thanks brought a lump to Pen's throat, and she was obliged to wink hard to keep away the tears. Mrs. Graham looked very ill indeed, it seemed to Pen, who felt extremely downcast at her wan appearance.

After Pen had told Mrs. Graham all she could, Susan took her to call on Gardner, where the story had to be repeated all over again. By that time, Pen found it was time for her to be starting back. As she and Susan stood together at the door, Pen said, "I'd give a lot if I could stay here to help you, Susan. Really I'd be so glad if I only could."

"Thanks, Pen, but don't worry. I have Don. He does everything for Gard, of course, and helps me besides. But of course, he has to give part of the time to his work."

Pen, who had somehow received the impression that Mr. Reeves lived on an income without earning any money, looked surprised.

"Oh, yes, Don translates books, mostly scientific ones. He's very clever, and he has a lot of it to do. I don't believe it pays awfully well," she added frankly, "but Don doesn't care, just so long as he can live with us peacefully in the country and teach us, and get out of doors a lot," explained Susan. "I'm awfully glad you came, Pen, because I couldn't get away yesterday to see you, and I guess I'm stuck here for some time. Do come just as often as you possibly can, won't you? It's so —so lonesome without Larry."

"I will come, Susan," promised Pen, "and I'll come Saturday. Good-bye, and try not to

feel too badly about Larry. Some time I hope you'll know Dexter and the Forresters too, and then you'll know that Larry was in good hands."

"Oh but, Pen, I don't want him to go off around the world," cried Susan dolefully. "It wouldn't be so bad, if he were staying in New York, but I can't bear to think of him on the ocean and getting farther and farther away all the time. Nothing'll ever be quite the same again now that Larry's gone."

"Well, he's not going till after Christmas, and something may happen before then."

"Maybe. But I don't see what unless it's somebody else breaking a leg or something," said Susan pessimistically, "anyhow I'm not looking forward to Christmas without Larry. It will be awful. But of course, he can't come home when he's earning so little and when there are so many extra expenses here. . . . I hope I'll be more cheerful next time you come, but oh, Pen, I *am* blue to-day."

"I don't blame you a bit," exclaimed Pen. "I could sit down and cry with you."

Susan smiled suddenly.

"You *are* a dear, Pen, and we'll never forget what you did for our Larry, you may be sure of that."

CHAPTER XIII

PEN CHANGES HER PLANS

DECEMBER flew by on wings, for Pen was very busy indeed. She had school and home study in the first place. Then there was always housework. In addition, she went out to the Grahams as often as she could and finally, all the remaining hours and parts of hours she spent typing the manuscript which Dexter had sent her.

Fortunately for Pen, her course at school was not a hard one, and since she had always learned rapidly, she was often able to complete her preparations for the next day's lessons in her spare periods during school hours. In fact, she was quick and energetic in everything she did—studying, housework and typing. The result was that she accomplished more than most girls of her age.

The great object of Pen's efforts now was to complete enough of the copying of the manuscript to make it possible to get to New York for Christmas week. She had already written to Dexter concerning the idea, and he had writ-

ten back, expressing himself so delighted at the prospect that Pen was spurred to work harder than ever. She made him promise to keep it a secret and they were planning to surprise the Forresters by her appearance. In every letter Dexter set forth some new and absurd idea for the manner in which Pen's presence should be revealed.

It was a beautiful secret and Pen was very happy and excited over it. She had not yet asked Aunt Emily if she might go, but although she decided to wait until just before the time came, she felt rather sure her aunt would not really prevent her. So long as they were going away and so long as Aunt Hester's house would be more than comfortably filled, Pen could easily be spared. At any rate, this was the way Pen argued to herself, and she continued to work feverishly at the typing.

In the matter of allowing Pen to go out to see the Grahams, Mrs. Atkinson proved unexpectedly lenient. It was partly due to the fact that the Grahams were poor, and thus, in Aunt Emily's way of looking at things, on a lower social scale than herself, from which they could not patronize her. The Forresters, who had been so much wealthier, she had resented because she felt they must be setting themselves above her. Aunt Emily enjoyed the feeling of

condescension she entertained toward the Grahams, and considered herself entirely within her rights to take such an attitude. But she became very bitter at the mere idea of any one else claiming the same privilege in relation to herself. She was also, to do her justice, sorry for the Grahams because of the various misfortunes they were suffering.

It was a great help, of course, to Pen that Aunt Emily did not object to her visits, and she went twice a week regularly in spite of the weather. There were one or two snowfalls in December, but much to Pen's disappointment they either melted rapidly or were not sufficiently heavy to make snowshoeing possible again.

Matters in the Graham family did not improve very much during that mild December. Mrs. Graham continued in bed, and her condition worried her family more and more. Gard's broken leg was mending properly, but he was out of work all month and extremely blue and despondent over the consequent loss of money.

Mr. Graham, who was none too strong, caught a cold from sitting in damp clothes and wet shoes one day after a tramp to the station in a rainstorm. The cold came near enough to pneumonia to frighten the Grahams badly, and

resulted in the doctor forcing him to stay at home for more than two weeks.

"This is the worst December I ever knew," said Susan, one afternoon when Pen arrived. "Everything possible has happened, it seems to me. Dad's getting along all right now, but I dread having him start off again these cold, raw days. The walk across the open to the train so early in the morning is terribly bitter sometimes, and once you've had a bad cold like that, you're bound to be more susceptible, I think. But wait, let me tell you the latest calamity. Blair went to a fire yesterday in Trimville, and he rushed in to help and ruined his overcoat, and even his suit is so badly torn and burned he has to get a new one right away. It's awful how expensive clothes like that are, too!"

"I should think the—the people—*somebody*—would pay for them if he helped put out the fire," said Pen indignantly.

"Well, of course, it happened that the people had just moved into the house, and it wasn't even insured. Poor things, it was terrible for them! They have several children, and they lost all their furniture and clothes. So naturally Blair couldn't expect to get anything for *his* clothes. There won't be many Christmas presents in this family this year, that's certain.

We'll be lucky if we have a dinner to eat if things keep on happening."

"It does seem as if you had a new calamity to tell me about every time I come," said Pen sympathetically. "Still Mr. Reeves and Pat and Blair and you are all pretty well now, aren't you?"

"Yes, thank goodness," replied Susan wearily, "but I certainly *am* tired. I know what I'd like for a Christmas present. I'd like a trip to a place like that tropical beach in the picture in Don's room. And I'd like to lie on the warm sand and soak in hot sunshine and do nothing. I'd never move—not for days and days——"

"Poor *Susanna mia*," said Mr. Reeves who had just come into the room.

" 'She'd like to be a little rock
A-setting on a hill,
A-doing nothing all day long
But just a-setting still.
She wouldn't eat, she wouldn't drink,
She wouldn't even wash.
She'd set and set a thousand years
And rest herself, by gosh!' "

"I certainly would, Don," murmured Susan.

"About one or two days would be your limit," he replied. "You haven't the temperament suitable for long extended periods of tropical indolence. You'd want to be up and doing something."

"I don't feel that way now. Tropical indolence would suit me fine. I suppose Larry will see the tropics," said Susan, who could never keep the conversation from the subject of Larry for very long at a time, "but I wish we could see him again first. I don't suppose we could possibly afford to have him come home for Christmas, do you, Don?"

"Not a chance, on the present exchequer, I fear," returned Mr. Reeves regretfully. "We need coal and Blair's clothes, and there are all the doctor's bills."

"Oh yes, of course, I know it can't be done," said Susan sighing, "but mother feels so badly over it. I believe she'd get better if we could have Larry home again. But she won't hear of my telling him she's sick. She simply *made* me promise I'd not tell him when I wrote. She writes short notes herself even though she doesn't feel up to writing at all."

They sat in silence for a few minutes, and then Pen said, more for something to say than because she felt the question specially appropriate, "Has any one done any more exploring in the attic?"

"No, not a bit," answered Susan, stretching wearily, "I've lost interest in it myself. I've been too busy even to think about secret passages. If any one does it, it will be Blair."

The next time Pen went to see Susan, it was only a little more than a week before Christmas and she carried with her the almost-too-good-to-be-true knowledge that she was really going to New York. She had the day before screwed up her courage and explained to Aunt Emily why she was doing the typing. And much to her relief and happiness, Aunt Emily, after a first shock of surprise and a first instinctive and indignant refusal to let her go, had thought the matter over and had rapidly come to a favorable decision.

Just as Pen had hoped, it was partly the thought of Aunt Hester's crowded house that influenced her and partly that, as Aunt Emily put it, "Pen couldn't seem to get along well with Evelyn." After she had once obtained Aunt Emily's consent, however, Pen did not care a fig for anything else. It had been hard at supper to bear Evelyn's remarks when she heard the news, but Pen was too happy to let it have more than a passing effect upon her high spirits:

"Well," Aunt Emily had announced, "what do you think Pen is going to do? She's going to New York for the Christmas vacation."

"She *is*?" cried Evelyn. "Well, I like that! I'd like to know who's going to pay for her

trip? You'd never let *me* take money from people, ma."

"Pen's earning it herself, typewriting," said Mrs. Atkinson.

"She *is*?" exclaimed Evelyn again, this time scornfully. "My heavens! I never heard of any one getting that much money just for typing. Do you know how much it costs to get to New York?"

"Yes, I do," replied Pen promptly, "and I'm going to earn plenty. Perhaps you didn't know that I'm getting fifty cents a thousand words for copying that book. That's the regular price they pay in the city, Dexter said. And there are about a hundred thousand words, and that means I'll earn at least fifty dollars. That's enough for train fare to New York and back. I know I won't have any expenses after I get there because I'm going to visit Dexter and the Forresters."

Evelyn looked stunned for a moment. Fifty dollars sounded like a lot of money to her. She could scarcely believe that Pen was actually earning that sum all herself.

"Well," she said finally, "you may have money for train fare but I don't see how you can go with the clothes you've got. New York! If the Forresters' friends are as rich as *they*

are, you'll feel pretty funny, I should think——"

"I can't help that," said Pen quickly, "they know I'm poor and whatever the Forresters think, Dexter won't care about my clothes. I'll stay right with him if the Forresters seem to be ashamed of having me around."

After supper, while Pen was doing the final cleaning up in the kitchen, she heard Evelyn saying to her mother in the other room, "Well, it just makes me sick, the way Pen gets things. I'm dying to go to New York myself and always have been. I don't see why *she* should get the first chance! I'm sick of Megamoc. Seems to me I never go anywhere or have any fun."

Pen smiled and sighed. It was useless to expect anything else from Evelyn. But she knew that Susan would rejoice in her good fortune.

"What's the calamity this time, Susan?" she asked when she arrived at the Grahams next day, bursting with her own good news.

"Nothing special except that Blair's getting more troublesome all the time," said Susan gloomily, "and everything just seems unhappy and upset. You see, ever since Larry went away Blair has been hinting that something ought to be done about that Leverett money that Larry is going to give up. He's made

mother awfully unhappy, and now he's threatening to go away. It's horrid. We need the money he's earning, too, and even if we didn't, it would be so hard for mother to have him go away right after Larry's leaving home. I know, too, that mother would worry about Blair if he went, because she feels he'd be more likely to get into bad company in a city, whereas you just know you can trust Larry to get along all right. Oh dear, do you realize it's almost Christmas? If I could only get Larry home for Christmas, I wouldn't care about presents and fuss or anything. That would be the best thing, and the thing that would cheer us all up most. I haven't any heart for planning things when mother is so sick and unhappy."

Pen's news died before it reached her lips. She had never told Susan what she planned to do with her typing money, because she wanted to wait till she was quite sure she could carry out her plan.

And now, in the face of all of their troubles, she felt as if she could hardly expect Susan to rejoice over a pleasure trip to be made by her to New York. At the present moment Susan could only be interested in a trip made by Larry *from* New York to Megamoc.

A sudden idea came to Pen—suppose she

gave up her trip to New York and sent the money to Larry for him to come home instead!

And then she thought, wretchedly, "Oh, I *can't* do it! I want to go so much. I've planned and worked so hard, and Dexter would be so disappointed!" Her thoughts ran on rapidly. Give up this wonderful chance to see New York and all it meant—theaters, sightseeing, Fifth Avenue, the big gorgeous stores, the crowds of gay people and the marvelous Broadway electric signs! Give up all this and go instead to Aunt Hester's in Scotfield where at best she was simply the poorest of the "poor relations"? Oh no! It was too much to ask of her. She dismissed the idea quickly.

A little later she went upstairs with Susan to see Mrs. Graham and the sight of her white face and hollow eyes gave Pen a shock. It seemed to her that even in the last few days Susan's mother had grown worse.

On the way downstairs she caught Susan wiping away tears, and when she put her arm around her, Susan suddenly broke down and sobbed as Pen had never heard her cry before.

"Oh dear, I'm so worried about mother, she just isn't getting any better, and she looks awful now."

Pen made up her mind suddenly.

"Susan," she exclaimed, "listen to me! I've

got a wonderful idea! It may not make your mother well, but it will certainly make her feel lots better. Let's get Larry home for Christmas for a surprise and not tell any of the family. It would be such fun, wouldn't it?"

"Oh Pen, as if I wouldn't like it better than anything else in the world," exclaimed Susan, "but we haven't the money and we can't possibly get it. How *can* we have Larry come home?"

"Well, you know that typing I'm doing? They're going to pay me a lot for it—just think, fifty cents a thousand words. That'll be around fifty dollars when it's done. We can give Larry that to come home with."

She hesitated for a moment to think how best to proceed. She did not want Susan to guess she had planned to go to New York herself with the money. But Susan was a very shrewd young person with a good memory, and she had already guessed.

"Oh no, Pen, we couldn't take that. I remember you told me once how much you wanted to go to New York Christmas but you didn't want to take Dexter's money. Weren't you planning to use this yourself? You certainly ought to, Pen. It would be so wonderful with those lovely friends of yours to do things for you."

“No,” said Pen decidedly, “I can go to New York next year just as well, and this is a special and important occasion. It’s *you* who need a good time, Susan, not I. You’ve had a terrible winter so far. Don’t you suppose if I had enough money I wouldn’t be glad to give it all to you to go anywhere in the world you wanted to? Why, you’re one of my very best friends, Susan, and my *best girl* friend anyway. You must take this. Listen, Susan, don’t you want your mother to have Larry for Christmas? You said yourself it would do her more good than anything else.”

“I know it, Pen,” said Susan slowly. She stared into the fire, her lips quivering, her hands clenched in her lap.

“Well, then,” insisted Pen, “we’ll do it. And think, Susan, what fun it will be to plan the surprise! It would be too bad for Pat not to have any Christmas fun. If you knew Larry was coming, you’d feel like doing something to make a more cheerful time, wouldn’t you? You can get a sweet Christmas tree right out back in the Fearful Forest, and lovely greens for garlands. This house with the white panels will trim up beautifully. And Uncle Lije always has holly in the store. I know he’d give me some. And Gard is loads better, isn’t he,

and so's your father, and maybe we'll have some more snow for Christmas——”

Susan had gradually begun to look more hopeful as Pen rushed on, incoherent but full of excited, earnest pleading. The picture of a happy Christmas with all the family together, after the cheerless month of sickness, accidents and general gloom, was more than Susan could resist.

“Oh Pen, it sounds great! All I can say is, you must let me pretend I'm borrowing the money. I'll pay you back when——”

“When you find the chest of gold!” smiled Pen, forgetting her own disappointment in the pleasure of planning the Grahams' Christmas.

“I hope we won't have to wait till then,” retorted Susan. “But Pen, will you come here for Christmas and help us celebrate? Couldn't you come beforehand just as soon as your school stops? Half the fun is getting ready. Only,” she paused, hesitating, “only perhaps you'd rather go to Scotfield? There'll be more going on and probably more food and everything.”

“Oh, Susan,” exclaimed Pen, “I'd rather come here *any* time. I don't want to go to Scotfield a bit. I want to come here.”

Oh, surely, if she did not go to New York, she could at least have the next best thing! No

matter *what* Aunt Emily said, Pen decided, setting her teeth grimly, she was going to spend Christmas with the Grahams.

"Now I'll write to Dexter to-night and tell him to give the money I'm to get to Larry. I'll write a note to go with it, and you must write to Larry, too, Susan. I think you'll have to tell him your mother is sick and make sure he doesn't refuse to come."

"Oh, he couldn't. I'll write to-night," replied Susan. "Oh my, Pen, I'm so happy and so excited. I don't know how to thank you. It's something we can never really pay for——"

"Nonsense," said Pen briskly, "it's pay enough to see you look natural again, Susan. Do you know you haven't been yourself for ages and ages—and I don't like it."

"I don't either," admitted Susan ruefully, "but now I feel all fixed up again. Next time you come we'll plan about everything, what to trim the tree with and how we'll decorate the rooms and what to put in Pat's stocking and everything!"

Pen went off smiling, but she had not gone very far on her walk home through the dark, when a great wave of bitter disappointment swept over her, and in spite of her best efforts, tears rolled down her cheeks. Pen was no

saint. It was *not* easy to give up her trip, she reflected mournfully. And she had been so happy planning with Dexter for her visit! She decided to postpone telling the Atkinsons of her change in plans until the following day. She hesitated to give the real reason, but finally decided it was the only thing to do. She spent an unhappy evening nevertheless, and cried herself to sleep.

But by the next evening she had pulled herself together sufficiently to announce the fact that she was not going to New York for Christmas after all. Pressed by Aunt Emily as to her reasons, Pen explained briefly.

"Well, for the land sakes, Pen, you beat all!" exclaimed Mrs. Atkinson.

"*Good-night!*" cried Evelyn. "Well, you certainly *are* an easy mark! I guess you like Larry Graham better than Ingham Forrester, all right. You won't see Ingham at all now. Before I'd give up a trip to New York for *any* boy," she ended scornfully.

Pen did not explain that she was doing it chiefly for Susan and Mrs. Graham, not for Larry.

"Well, after all, it's Pen's money and I presume she can do what she wants to with it," said Mr. Atkinson.

"Now, I've already told Aunt Hester you

weren't coming and she invited Adeline Marsh," said Mrs. Atkinson. "She hadn't intended to at first because there wasn't room. I don't know how we'll fix it——"

"Never mind about telling her at all," interrupted Pen. "I'll go to the Grahams' instead."

"Well, I shouldn't think it was much of a place to visit, with all the sickness and trouble they've had," said Mrs. Atkinson doubtfully.

"I can help with the work, and they really want me," replied Pen. And so the matter was settled.

CHAPTER XIV

CHRISTMAS PREPARATIONS

PEN rather dreaded the prospect of getting Dexter's letter in answer to hers telling him she was not coming to New York after all. She felt uncomfortably as if she had done something disloyal to him, as though she were deserting him for her new friends. But after all, she reflected, though Dexter might be disappointed, still he would have Uncle Terry and the Forresters to console him. He was so generous himself and had so appreciated what Pen did for him when he was alone and helpless, that he would surely understand now and uphold her in her resolution. She prayed that he would not make it harder for her.

Her confidence in Dexter was wholly justified. His letter made her cry at first, but it seemed as if those tears washed away all the bitterness of her disappointment and left her peaceful and serenely happy.

"Dearest Sammie: Well, bless your heart. You certainly think of the sweetest things to do for other people! It's just like you and the

wonderful things you were always doing for me last summer. Oh, Sammie, I'm woefully disappointed that you're not coming! But when I remember all the Good Samaritan deeds I let you do for me, all the sacrifices I let you make, I simply can't be selfish enough now to object. I can't be anything except glad for the Grahams that they are benefiting by your friendship. It's a shame for you to lose the trip to New York, because, of course, the Forresters would have made it lively for you. But never mind, Sammie, better times aren't so far off, after all. Hang on a little longer, and you'll surely get to New York sometime.

"Meanwhile, remember that no matter how much you play Good Samaritan to anybody else, you're *my* Sammie and always will be. Nothing I could ever give you would be too good for you, and no words I could ever say would be strong enough to express how proud I am of you! And now, Sammie, dear, I shall think of you having the happiest kind of Christmas with the Grahams, because you've made them so happy. I shall miss you but *I* shall be happy, too, because I can claim you for my nearest and dearest friend. Dexter."

That was a letter to read and re-read till it sang itself in her heart all day long. Dexter's

approval meant more to Pen than anything in the world, and his glowing words of praise filled her with a wonderful, thoroughly contented happiness. After that, she did not waste any more time vainly regretting her lost pleasures. Instead, she began to look forward to Christmas with the Grahams, her excitement at the prospect increasing every day. Even if it weren't New York, it was going to be the best Christmas Pen had ever had—her first one away from the unloving atmosphere in the Atkinson household.

“Just think,” she reflected wonderingly, “I never imagined last year that this year I'd actually be spending Christmas in the old Juniper James house right in the middle of the Golden Orchard! I thought it would never in the world be opened again, and now it not only has been, but I've been in it myself, and there was a secret staircase and all!”

On Pen's last visit to the Grahams' before she went for the Christmas stay, she and Susan had so much to talk about that it seemed as if they could never get it all said. Susan sent Pat off for a walk with Mr. Reeves to give them a chance to talk freely for a time at least.

“I don't see how I'll get everything over here,” said Pen. “Uncle Lije has promised me holly and nuts and raisins and things from

the store. And then I'm to bring my presents from home, the ones Aunt Emily and Uncle Lije and Evelyn are giving me. Then there's the fir balsam pillow I made for your mother, and just one or two other little things."

"Well, I'll tell you what," said Susan, "I simply must have a chance to buy some things, too. I'll leave Pat here with mother and Gard, and Don and I will go to Megamoc the day you're coming here, and we'll help you carry things back. Maybe we can get a ride with somebody part way out Blackberry Street."

"That would be fine!" exclaimed Pen delighted.

"Just think, Larry will be here in—let me see, only four more days, Pen," said Susan. "You can't think what a hard time I'm having not to tell any one. I actually have to try to keep from smiling too much. I think Don has guessed that something is up, but I've decided to tell him anyway. I need his help."

"Yes, I think you'd better," said Pen. "You need some one who can think quickly in an emergency so you won't give the whole thing away sometime. If I get here two days before Christmas, we can get a lot done. Shall we decorate the house before Larry comes or wait and have him help Christmas Eve with trimming the tree and all?"

"It's hard to know the best thing to do," pondered Susan. "Larry won't get here till nearly seven o'clock, perhaps later, so by the time he's eaten supper and seen the family and talked, there won't be much evening left. But I do want the tree and everything ready to surprise Pat for Christmas morning."

"Why not have Mr. Reeves get the Christmas tree between now and Christmas Eve and hide it in the woodshed? Then we can set it up and trim it after Pat has gone to bed. Don't you think Larry would love to help with the trimming and hanging wreaths and garlands? I do."

"Oh yes, so do I," agreed Susan. "We'll do it that way, but it makes a lot of work all for one evening, with Pat's stocking to fill, too."

"I found some things up in our attic that I'm going to bring for Pat's stocking," said Pen. "They belonged to Evelyn years ago."

"Wasn't it nice of her to give them to you?" remarked Susan. "What are they, Pen?"

Pen did not explain that it was not Evelyn who had voluntarily offered her bygone treasures, but Aunt Emily who had had a sudden fit of "attic-cleaning" and decided to get rid of a lot of old stuff she had accumulated.

"Why, there is a cunning little old-fashioned wooden tea set, and a little brass tea caddy, and

a doll's hammock, and some little carved ivory figures that great-grandfather Atkinson, who was a sea captain, brought home from one of his voyages. I'm awfully glad I found them because I know Pat will love them," said Pen. "And I made a few paper dolls for her. I was making some to send to Phoebe Forrester. She's one of the twins, you know, about Pat's age."

"Pen, you oughtn't to do so much," exclaimed Susan, "with the pillow for mother and all those things from your uncle's store—to say nothing of the money for Larry! Don't you dare give *me* anything, Pen!"

Pen smiled.

"Don't you order me round, Susan Graham. I guess I'm old enough to decide whether I'll give any one any Christmas present or not."

"I've been trying to decide what I'll do about surprising mother with Larry," went on Susan, ignoring Pen's remark. "I think when I take her supper to her, I'll just say, 'I'm going to bring you your dessert later. It's something special for Christmas Eve.'"

"But won't she hear the excitement downstairs when Larry gets here?" asked Pen. "If you knew exactly when he was coming, you could get the rest of the family to go upstairs to your mother's room because, you could say,

you had a special surprise dessert and you wanted them all to have it together up there.”

“Yes, that would be a good way. Well, unless anything happens, he’ll be on the train that gets in here at seven o’clock. I believe they’ll stop at this crossing if any one wants to get off even if it isn’t a regular stop. So if I send the family up to mother’s room after supper anyhow, it’ll be all right, and when I hear the train whistle, I’ll go downstairs and pretend I’m getting the dessert.” She laughed, “I guess I’ll have to get a real dessert, too, after making them go without at supper. Oh, I know what I’ll have, too, but I shan’t tell you, Pen. I’m going to surprise you, too.”

“Oh, it’s going to be such fun, isn’t it, Susan? A real Christmas with all sorts of surprises and a tree and everything! Now if it would snow, wouldn’t that be the only thing left to want! Uncle Lije said this morning, when I asked him, that he thinks it will snow Christmas Eve and anyhow on Christmas Day.”

“It’s going to be a so much nicer Christmas than I ever thought it would—thanks to you, Pen,” said Susan. “Of course, most everything is just the same, doctor’s bills, and coal and all, but they don’t seem so bad now somehow. I just feel as if Larry’s coming would

bring us good luck and turn the tide of accidents and hard times we have been having. If only Blair will behave himself! I just pitched into him and made him stop bothering poor mother about the money. He is awfully anxious to find out just how much money was left to Larry and where it is and just what the papers say about it. You remember one of the first times you came to see us, Pat said she saw Blair take dad's keys? He said he didn't, but I'm sure he must have, and I think that was just what he was after—he wanted to look among dad's private papers!"

"Do you suppose he found out anything?" asked Pen.

"No, because he's still looking and snooping around," returned Susan. "He got scared off that time by Pat seeing him, and after that he couldn't get the keys because dad takes them with him usually. It just happened that he forgot them that day."

Pat and Mr. Reeves came in at that moment and made further planning impossible.

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When Pen set off for the Grahams' with Susan and Mr. Reeves two days before Christmas, there was a slight feeling of disappointment in her heart. There had been no Christmas package for her from either Dexter or the

Forresters. That meant she would have to wait until her return to see what they were sending. Well, at least it would be something to look forward to, like an extra Christmas.

But just as they reached the Golden Orchard, they saw the rural mail wagon in the distance. There was no real road up to the Grahams' place, but a rough wagon trail wound across a corner of the neighboring field. Here the postman usually got down and walked the rest of the way.

"Oh look, Pen," cried Susan, who had hurried ahead. "Here are two packages for you. Isn't that great! Both from New York."

"Oh goody!" exclaimed Pen. "Wasn't that just like them to think of sending the things out here for me? I think it's wonderful."

"Are you going to open them right away?" asked Susan, when they were inside the house warming themselves by the open fire.

"I think I'll take off the outer wrappers anyhow," answered Pen, kneeling on the rug and examining the outside of her packages carefully in the flickering light.

"Oh yes, do," urged Pat, who was hanging over the packages, just as interested and curious as Pen herself. Even Hank, grown now into quite a substantial-sized kitten, was already playing with a loose bit of paper and

tugging at an end of twine as if he were determined to help the unwrapping process to the best of his ability.

The larger package was from the Forresters, and when it was opened, disclosed a most tempting array of smaller packages, all beautifully done up in white and red tissue paper, a great deal of bright red ribbon and many gaily colored Christmas stickers. Pen was not surprised to find that there were packages marked for each one of the Graham family.

“Do you mean to say they’ve sent us *each* something?” exclaimed Susan, taking the little package marked “A Merry Christmas to Susan Graham from the Forrester Family.” But looking at it in amazement she added, “But isn’t it lovely of them, Pen? I wonder what it can possibly be? My, I’m dying to open it. The things are all different shapes too so it shows they picked out something for each of us separately.”

“Couldn’t I open mine now?” asked Pat anxiously, “and just peek in?”

“Mercy, no, *indeed*,” said Susan emphatically. “You must keep it for Christmas, Pat, and you’re going to bed real early to-night, too, so Christmas will come all the sooner. Just think, only day after to-morrow!”

“Day after to-morrow!” echoed Pat happily.

"Well, just the same, I'm going to take this present with me and put it beside my bed where I can see it first thing to-morrow morning," and she fingered the gay little package with loving touches.

Dexter's parcel was heavy, and when the outer wrapper came off, it also disclosed an array of neatly wrapped packages.

"They all look like books," said Gardner, interestedly watching from his couch which they had pulled up to one corner of the hearth for him.

"It does," agreed Pen, "and there's one for each of you here, too! My, isn't it fun? And just look at all the things for me from the Forresters, one from each one of the family! I don't see how I can wait till day after to-morrow. Where shall we put them all, Susan?"

"Well, we always like a special place for our own things," replied Susan, "and, of course, there are the six window seats to begin with. But I think maybe you'd better have that side table, Pen. You're going to have the best showing of presents, I'm sure. And anyhow, you're the guest of honor."

"Then I shall have the window seat next to the table," cried Pat. "Can't I have something to put on it *now*, Susan?"

"You can have the package that came in

Dexter's box," said Pen. "Here, it feels like a book."

"I hope it has pictures in it," said Pat. "Oh, look, see the lovely red paper and green ribbon! I—I—want to take this up to bed with me, too, Susan."

"Oh Pat, you can't carry everything around with you," laughed Susan. "Do leave one thing on your window seat. See, I'm going to put both of mine on my place."

It was plain that Pat hated to be parted from her wonderful and mysterious new gifts for a whole night, but having once tried the effect of the be-ribboned package lying in state on the window seat, she decided to let it stay.

"We'll need a guide to all these displays," said Mr. Reeves, "otherwise some one might make a mistake and think Pat's place was some one else's."

"He's only teasing, Pat," said Susan, at Pat's look of alarm.

"Better have printed signs, I guess. Suppose I make some this evening," suggested Mr. Reeves.

"That would be fine, Don. Do let's have signs."

It was a very busy evening for them all after Pat had been sent to bed. Mr. Reeves brought in a great fragrant heap of pine and larch and

evergreen branches, and from these Susan and Pen, Gard, Mr. Graham, and even Blair, fashioned surprisingly attractive wreaths and many yards of garlands.

"Some of the red ribbon that's on these Christmas packages from the Forresters would look nice on the wreaths, wouldn't it?" suggested Pen.

"But—you don't want to spoil the pretty bundles yet," said Susan.

"Well, I tell you what. We're not going to put the wreaths up anyway till late to-morrow, and I'll leave the ribbons till then."

"Oh, look at the neat way Don has made the signs for our places," cried Susan. "They're little doors with name plates and Christmas wreaths on each one."

"We'll tack them up over each place, and then I guess there'll be no trouble identifying your own location," said Mr. Reeves gravely.

It was late when they finally stopped working, hid the wreaths and garlands carefully away in the cellar, and swept up all traces of their evening's occupation. Susan threw the dustpan full of pine needles and bits of resinous twigs on the smouldering log in the fireplace, and they sat for a few minutes longer enjoying the crackling and the spicy fragrance.

After they were in bed, Susan said to Pen,

“Only one more night and one day—and Larry will be here. Oh Pen, I’m so happy! I can hardly wait for mother to see him. I’m so excited I don’t even want to sleep, but I’m so tired, so dead-dog-tired that I *have* to sleep, or I’d never get through to-morrow.”

“Oh yes,” said Pen, “you certainly must. Isn’t everything going fine? Getting ready for Christmas is such fun! Do you think any of them guess that Larry is coming, Susan?”

“Don’t think so.”

“Well, when I was opening those New York parcels this afternoon, there was one in each marked for Larry. I just barely got them hidden under some others before Pat started to examine them. I know she’d have been curious.”

“Yes, trust Pat to want to know why,” murmured Susan. “Pen, I’m getting sleepy. We’ll fix all the other things to-morrow. Good-night.”

As usual, Pen lay awake a little longer, just for the sheer pleasure of thinking things over.

“I wish there could be some lovely surprise for Susan,” she reflected, “there’s something for every one else, seems to me. My present certainly isn’t much, though I think she’ll like it, just that sketch of Larry’s head. It isn’t

nearly as good as I wish it were. I can't think of any nice surprise to do for Susan. Perhaps Larry will have one. . . ."

And then Pen too fell sound asleep.

CHAPTER XV

SUSAN'S SURPRISE

PEN enjoyed the day before Christmas from beginning to end. There was a great deal to do but every one worked hard. The excitement which she and Susan were trying to hide from the rest, seemed nevertheless to shine out through their eyes and to ring in their voices. Their high spirits infected the others, and there was more laughter and fun in the big old house than there had been for a month, Susan confided to Pen.

While they were washing the dishes after lunch, Mr. Reeves came into the kitchen, bringing the tray with Mrs. Graham's dishes. "*Susanna mia*," he said, "do you need me for anything special this afternoon?"

"Why no, Don, I think not," replied Susan. "Most of the heavy work is done now."

"Well, I thought I'd go over to Trimville and do a little shopping. I got a modest check this morning and I feel the Christmas spirit move me. Suppose I take Pat along and show

her the gay life of Trimville's shopping center?"

"Oh Don, bless you for that idea," cried Susan. "That would be a wonderful help. Pat would adore it, and I could get lots done while she's away. We want to string pop corn for the tree and make some more things for ornaments. We haven't very much to put on it besides the usual family tree relics."

"How about some candles and tinsel?" continued Mr. Reeves. "I could get some of those. We *must* have enough candles. I don't care whether there's anything else on the tree or not——"

"Yes, do get them—lots of red candles, Don, and that long glittery tinsel stuff you hang all over the tree so it just drips with silvery—silvery, oh, things like icicles," said Susan, too excited to choose her words carefully. "I'll get Pat ready right away."

She started for the living room but at the door was met by a protesting cry, "Don't come in, Susan, Gard and I are fixing something you can't see."

"All right, darling," laughed Susan good-naturedly, backing out quickly, "but hurry, Pat. You're going to have a wonderful treat, and I want to get you ready. Don's going to

take you to Trimville to do some Christmas shopping."

"Oh, Susan, really? Goody, goody!" and Pat came flying out, her eyes big with excitement.

After they had left, Susan and Pen and Gard worked fast and furiously. Susan got out from one of the trunks a battered old box marked "Graham Family Christmas Tree Ornaments."

"We always carry these around with us wherever we go," she explained to Pen. "Some of them are as old as I am. But we love them and it wouldn't seem like our tree if it didn't have them on it. Look at this quaint little wax angel with pearl wings. We have to be careful not to get it too near a candle flame. And this little birdcage with the wax canary in it—and see these queer foreign shells. Here's a little wooden Santa Claus and some funny baskets, gilded outside and filled with something that looks like moss. Oh, and here's the Christmas angel with the star! That always goes on the very tip of the tree. Isn't it a sweet one?"

Pen duly admired the little collection of old-fashioned ornaments, most of which looked shabby and worn as if they had seen many years of service.

"Why, with candles and strings of popcorn

and tinsel, it'll be a lovely tree," exclaimed Pen. "Where shall we put it?"

"I think in the front corner beyond the fireplace," said Susan. "We can see it from everywhere in the room, and yet it won't be in the way."

"If I hadn't had this broken leg and been out of work so long," said Gard gloomily, "I could have got some decent presents for you all, Susan. As it is——"

"Never mind, Gard," said Susan quickly, "you've made some beautiful things! I know Pat will love that doll's bed. I'm going to show it to Pen. It's hidden up in the attic now. Gard painted it blue with a little stencil design of daisies, and really, it's just sweet. Oh dear, that reminds me, I meant to make the cover for it, but I just haven't had a minute."

"Let me do it," said Pen, "while you're doing other things. I'd love to."

"Oh, would you? I'd be ever so grateful!" said Susan. "Come on up and I'll show it to you and get the cloth."

They raced up to the attic to measure the little bed, but did not linger for it was very cold there. On the way downstairs Susan stopped at her mother's door, "Go on ahead, Pen, and I'll be down in a little while. I have to give mother her medicine."

On the stair landing, Pen glanced out of the big window to see what the weather was like. It was a dark, gloomy day and heavy clouds covered the whole sky.

"It does look like snow," she thought with satisfaction. "It'll be a white Christmas, I'm sure," and she went happily on downstairs. It was strange that she should find herself so entirely at home in the Grahams' house. She had a comfortable feeling of belonging with them.

"Say, Pen," exclaimed Gardner as she came into the living room, "will you do something for me while Susan's out of the way? Wrap this up for me, please! I haven't any paper." He took a woolen scarf out from under the couch cover and handed it to her.

"Oh, isn't it lovely!" cried Pen. "Did you make it?"

"Yes," admitted Gard, rather shamefaced at owning to his knitting accomplishments. "Since I've been laid up with this broken leg, I had to do something. I couldn't read all the time and I wanted Susan to have something pretty. I didn't know what else to give her. Dad got the wool for me, but I've had the Dickens of a time keeping Susan from seeing it. Do you think that it will be becoming to her?" he ended anxiously.

"I certainly do. You couldn't have chosen anything better than that soft jade green with white stripes. It's a beauty, and such fine wool," answered Pen.

"Well, I'm glad you like it, Pen. Did you see the one I'm making for mother? I've got to work hard to finish it before to-morrow," and he started knitting rapidly on a soft blue scarf.

Pen took Susan's present and wondered how in the world she would ever do it up for Gardner. She had no nice paper and ribbon or stickers. But in glancing over her packages from the Forresters, she found a fairly good-sized one with a tag marked in Ingham's writing, "With three barks from Funny Felix."

"I'll open the outside of this, I guess," she decided quickly, "then I can use the paper and ribbon for Gardner's present for Susan."

In a moment she had done so, and when she brought the attractive parcel for Gardner to write on, she was more than rewarded by his pleasure.

"Thanks ever so much, Pen," he exclaimed. "I did want Susan to have some pretty packages. She's worked so hard, poor kid, and been such a peach about everything. She just keeps the family going. Will you put it on her window seat, please?"

The afternoon sped by rapidly, and about half-past five Mr. Reeves, Pat, Mr. Graham and Blair all arrived at the same time, talking and laughing and bringing a fresh breath of wintry air with them into the warmth of the living room.

"Mercy, look at the packages!" exclaimed Susan. "You *have* been shopping, haven't you, Pat?"

"Oh, we had a lovely time," cried Pat, "and we saw Santa Claus in one of the stores and he gave me some candy. Look, Susan, and Don and I bought ever and ever so many things."

"How's mother, Susan?" asked Mr. Graham, as Susan took his overcoat from him and smoothed back his ruffled hair.

"I think she's a little more cheerful, dad," she replied. "Run along up to see her and then come to supper. It'll be ready in a few minutes and I know you're all hungry. Pat, dear, take off your things and put them away neatly like a good child. Then you sit down here with Gard and tell him all about Trimville and what you and Don did. Blair, would you please run down cellar and bring up a jar of peaches from the preserve closet—and look at the furnace while you're there and see if it needs coal. Don, you come out to the kitchen and tell Pen and me what you got."

Every one obeyed Susan's rapidly issued commands, and the electric thrill of excitement in the air seemed to increase every moment. Susan was fairly radiant—her eyes sparkled and her cheeks blazed with a bright red color. In the kitchen, Mr. Reeves put two packages aside and dumped the rest on the table. "Here, *Susanna mia*," he said, "you'll have to help me later on this evening get all this assortment of ten-cent store gifts tied up. There's the tinsel, and candles. I got five dozen of them, and one or two of the least obnoxious of the fancy ornaments you can buy in that valuable institution, the Land of the Nickel and the Dime."

"That's splendid," approved Susan, quickly putting things away out of sight.

"I got some tissue paper and gilt string, too," went on Mr. Reeves. "Didn't seem to be much of that around here, and we can't have the Forresters' packages outshine ours too far, eh?"

"Now, that was clever of you, Don," exclaimed Susan, patting his shoulder heartily. "We did need them. I don't care how poor the presents are, if they're wrapped nicely. Oh thanks, Blair, will you open the jar for me, please? And Pen, please cut the brown bread, while I take the baked beans out of the oven."

Don, be an angel, and fix Gard's tray for him, will you? I'm going to take mother's up myself."

It was a gay supper, but Pen noticed that Susan ate almost nothing. In the general excitement and Pat's almost unbroken flow of chatter, no one else noticed it, however. Pen herself was almost too excited to eat.

"What we going to have for dessert?" demanded Blair finally.

"You don't get any dessert now," replied Susan promptly. "It's a special Christmas Eve dessert and I'm going to serve it up in mother's room later on. Now, will you all please go up to mother's room and stay with her. Pen and I will come as soon as we've done the dishes, and then Don is going to read us some Christmas poems and perhaps a story. Dad, you and Don will get Gard upstairs, won't you, and Blair, run up and bring down mother's tray."

"Oh, Pen," said Susan, when they were alone in the kitchen, "I'm getting more and more thrilled! It's almost time for Larry to get here. And won't everybody be surprised?"

But there was a surprise in store for Susan, too, and for all the Graham household.

"Listen, Susan," exclaimed Pen, pausing in

the middle of wiping the last dish, "I hear some one coming. Could it be Larry already?"

Susan was lifting the dishpan to empty it. "I think it's too soon," she said, but she dropped the pan with a clatter and rushed to the back kitchen to open the outer door. Pen, following closely, saw to their surprise, a strange man standing on the steps, his hand raised to knock.

"I beg your pardon," he said, with a friendly smile, "I hope I'm in the right place? Does Mr. Stephen Graham live here?"

"Yes," answered Susan, so surprised she didn't know what to say.

The man drew an audible sigh of relief.

"May I come in?" he asked politely. "I'm an old friend of Mr. Graham's and I'd like to talk to him and Mrs. Graham, please."

"Oh yes, come in," replied Susan, "I'll—I'll—" She looked helplessly at Pen, who guessed her main concern was to make sure that nothing should spoil the surprise of Larry's arrival. But Pen had been looking closely at the stranger and she saw something that made her gasp and say on a sudden impulse, "Take him upstairs, Susan, they're all together there, and—and—I think it would be the best thing."



"THE MAN DREW AN AUDIBLE SIGH OF RELIEF."

“Do you? Well, all right. But you come, too, Pen.”

The man looked at Pen for a moment. “Are you both Mr. Graham’s daughters?” he asked pleasantly, as they mounted the stairs.

“Oh no,” replied Susan, “I am, but that’s our best friend, Penelope Poindexter.”

“Poindexter? I used to—” But to Pen’s disappointment, they reached the door of the Cupboard Room at that moment, and the rest of the sentence died on the stranger’s lips.

“Dad,” said Susan, “here’s a Christmas Eve caller for you and mother.”

And then Susan got her first surprise.

“Lance Leverett!” exclaimed Mr. Graham, jumping to his feet and seizing the stranger’s hands. “Where in the name of the Lord have you been? We were sure you were lost! Well, well, well, this is—this is *great!*”

“I *was* lost for a while, over in Australia,” replied the stranger, beaming back at Mr. Graham and shaking his hands vigorously, “but I’ll tell you all about that later on.” Then he turned to Mrs. Graham, “Helen, my dear, what does this mean? A nice welcome, after all these years, to find you sick in bed!”

Tears were running down Mrs. Graham’s cheeks. “Oh, Lance,” she exclaimed, “I’m so glad to see you. You’ve come just in time——”

"Hullo, Lance, old hobo," put in Mr. Reeves, coming forward and holding out his hand.

"By the almighty fishhooks," exclaimed Mr. Leverett, "old Aldous himself! You don't look a day older, and they told me you had—well, well, well——" He broke off in sudden confusion as if he had almost said more than he intended. But Mr. Reeves merely smiled his usual, calm, unruffled smile.

"And this is the family?" went on Mr. Leverett eagerly, looking about at the interested faces with all eyes glued upon him, "where is—which is—Larry?"

There was a sudden dead silence. Then Pat exclaimed shrilly, demanding, "Who is he, mother? Why does he want Larry?"

No one answered her.

Mrs. Graham looked distressed and cried, her lips quivering, "Oh, Lance, I—I tried so hard to keep him for you."

"Isn't he here?" exclaimed Mr. Leverett, and his face turned white suddenly. He looked stunned for a moment. "He's not—he's not——?" He seemed unable to finish his question.

"Oh *no!*" said Mr. Graham hastily, "the boy's all right. He is in New York right now. Wants to go to sea. He's as fine as they make them, Lance."

The other drew a deep breath and the color came back to his face.

"Well, thank God, he's alive and you know where he is." He looked about at the Grahams and, reading the curiosity and even a sort of fear on Susan's face, said abruptly, "You've kept the secret well, I see. Shall—— may I tell them now?"

"Yes, do," replied Mrs. Graham, "they'd have to know soon anyway."

Pen and Susan stood together at the foot of the bed, and Pen felt Susan's hand tighten its grip on hers till it hurt. What was this stranger about to say concerning their Larry? Why did he speak as if Larry belonged to—— *him?*

"Years ago, your father and I were friends," began Mr. Leverett, "long before either of us married. We were room-mates at college in a middle western town, and we were the best chums in the world. Then we both fell in love with a wonderful girl in that little town, and even though we were close rivals for this girl's hand, we remained the best of friends. We both had about the same amount of money, which was very little, eh, Stephen?"

Mr. Graham smiled and nodded but said nothing.

Mr. Leverett continued, "One of us was a

bookworm, a dreamer—the other was athletic, restless, a wanderer. The girl chose the bookworm to love!”

“It was a close call, though,” put in Mr. Graham, “for the athletic chap was the handsomest rascal in college, and nearly every girl in town would have given her ears to have him choose her.”

“Well,” resumed Mr. Leverett, “not to make the story too long, after college, the two boys separated, the one to take a position and later marry the girl, the other to go to New York to his home with an uncle and aunt and to seek his fortune.

“And then things happened. A fortune just tumbled into his lap, without his doing anything to earn it. You see I had an uncle and aunt who had brought me up and sent me to college. They weren’t very well off but they were remarkably fond of me and made sacrifices to get me there. After I got through college, my uncle’s business improved somewhat, and he got interested in oil—and almost overnight he made a fortune! Soon after that he was killed in an accident. The shock so affected my aunt who was not well, that she died about four months later. Her will left me everything, a matter of almost two million dollars.”

"Wow!" muttered Blair under his breath.

"Well, my chance to travel had come, of course," continued Mr. Leverett, "but just at that time I got interested in a beautiful young lady and before I knew what had happened to me, there I was, a married man."

He sat forward on his chair and stared at the floor with a sudden look of weariness and suffering on his face, as if it hurt to recall what he was about to relate. His voice dropped to a lower key, but he continued steadily, "My wife wasn't anxious to travel. She came from a wealthy family and she had been around the world and seen all the things the ordinary wealthy tourist looks at. She had no desire to rough it, to explore wild places such as I wanted to see. She wanted to settle down in a big house with much rich furniture and automobiles, and entertain and do all the conventional things rich society people do. It was her life, and she was used to it—she wanted me to do it too. I tried to, to please her, but I always hated it. And then our son was born—and we named him Rodney. Well, I was crazy about him and for a while I forgot that I wanted to travel.

"And then one day when he was only two years old, he—he was stolen, kidnapped. We never found him, though we spent money

in all directions. It almost sent me insane and then I realized it was due to the money we had. I saw how carefully rich people's children had to be guarded. They never could live a natural childhood, and I hated the money more than ever. Understand, I don't mean I don't like money and the pleasure you can get and the good you can do with it as well as the next one, but I saw then how it had power to harm you, too, and what a menace it could be to your happiness. I was pretty bitter for a while, missing my son.

"Soon after Rodney disappeared, our second son, Larry, was born."

Pen felt Susan tremble, and an audible "Oh!" came from the lips of the rest of the young Grahams.

"Yes, Larry is my son. But my wife died then. Somehow that baby made me more anxious than ever to get Rodney back, and at the same time I vowed that my second son should never be exposed to the same danger as the first. He should never be known as a rich man's child. So I took him and went to my old chum, Stephen Graham, who was living then in a little town in New York State with his wife and a son of his own. And I begged them to take my baby and bring him up with their children while I went off to find Rodney.

I had got half a clue that made me think he had been taken abroad somewhere.”

He paused for a moment. No one stirred. Then he continued, looking around at the Grahams, “I knew that Larry couldn’t be in better hands than with your father and mother, and I felt there would be less danger of his being spoiled if he could grow up with a family in moderate circumstances where he would appreciate the value of money. And besides, poor children don’t get stolen, and I couldn’t take any risks with this son. Your father would accept only a small sum of money a year for taking Larry and we agreed that Larry must not be told anything about me at all, and that if I came back before he grew up, I should pretend to be just an old friend.

“Well, I’ve been away a long time, all over the world, and I’ve been in queer places and seen some interesting things. I was in the fighting in the East during the World War, and I got hurt pretty badly. I’m just getting over it now. I was in a hospital out there nearly two years. Oh well. . . .” He broke off suddenly and hid his face in his hands for a moment with a queer gesture.

Then he looked up again and said, “My search for Rodney has been fruitless, but I

haven't given up quite yet. I thought perhaps now I might have Larry help me."

"Oh my!" exclaimed Pat who could no longer hold in, "are you really Larry's father?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Leverett, and then he asked eagerly, "Are you fond of Larry?"

"Oh my yes," retorted Pat emphatically, "when he went away to New York I cried and cried and cried. I love Larry!"

"He's a dear boy," put in Mrs. Graham softly. "He's never been a bit of trouble since he was a baby. I——Oh, I wish he were here. I tried to keep him but it was impossible. I did so hate to think of your coming back suddenly and not finding him here."

"Larry's a good boy," added Mr. Reeves briefly.

Mr. Leverett's eyes shone.

"I owe you about the biggest debt of gratitude a man can owe a friend, Stephen," he said. "I'm going to try to show you that I realize that, too. I'm grateful to all your children for the part I know they've played in giving Larry love and companionship of the best kind. It may seem rather like having deserted him, but I think I did the best thing for him I could have done. I've given him something better and more wonderful than money,

a childhood full of love and the influence of real parents instead of hired servants paid to take care of him. It was my good fortune that I was able to do so."

Susan moved, and Pen, glancing at her, saw her face was white and that she bit her lips to steady them. But she spoke up clearly, "If you'll excuse me, I'm just going down to get the dessert," she said, and slipped out of the room. Pen, listening eagerly, thought she heard the sound of a back door opening. In the intense interest of Mr. Leverett's story, she had forgotten to listen for the whistle of the train at the crossing, but she realized it must be past time for it.

"What's her name, Helen?" asked Mr. Leverett.

"That's Susan, and Larry's special chum," replied Mrs. Graham. "Susan has missed Larry badly this month."

"I'm going back to New York right away," said Mr. Leverett. "Where can I find him? I want my son."

Before Mrs. Graham could reply, the door opened and Susan said, "Mother, here's your surprise!"

CHAPTER XVI

CHRISTMAS EVE

THERE stood Larry in the doorway! He crossed the room in two strides and flung himself down on the bed, crying, "Mother! Merry Christmas, mother!"

There was a babel of voices then which drowned out Mrs. Graham's cry of joy, and for the next few moments, all was confusion while Larry was embraced and kissed by everybody in turn, including Pen. He gave Pen an extra kiss and whispered into her ear, "That's to thank you for making it possible for me to come. Gee, Pen, you're a brick!"

Mr. Leverett had stepped back into the shadows while these greetings were going on, but finally there was a lull, and Mrs. Graham, holding Larry's hand, spoke, "Larry darling, there's another surprise—for *you*, this time. Please everybody be quiet for a little while and let me tell Larry the story in a few words."

Larry now seemed to notice the stranger for the first time, but after one glance at him, he sat down quietly on the edge of Mrs. Graham's

bed, and kept his eyes fixed on her face all the time she was talking.

"And now, Larry," ended Mrs. Graham, "your real father wants your help in looking for your lost brother."

Mr. Leverett came forward, his hand held out. Larry stood up and silently shook hands with him, his eyes fastened on the older man's face. Finally he said, "It's—it's hard to realize. Gee, I feel sort of stunned."

"You certainly look a lot alike," put in Gardner. "Now we know why Larry was always the only good-looking Graham!"

Mr. Graham smiled, "Thank you for the compliment, son!"

"No offence meant, dad," replied Gardner, reaching out and patting his father's shoulder paternally. Every one laughed, and the strain of the tense moment was relieved.

"Well, my son," said Mr. Leverett, putting his hands on Larry's shoulders and looking into his eyes, "from what these folks tell me, I've got a boy to be proud of. I don't expect you to fall on my neck rejoicing over a long-lost parent. No reason why you should. You've never missed me. You've had as good a father and mother as any boy could want, all your life. You're not angry with me for having left you to them?"

Larry looked straight back into his new father's eyes and said quickly, "You bet your life I'm not, sir! You couldn't have picked out a better family, I'll tell the world." He smiled the sudden, irresistible, Larry-smile and added, "I don't mind telling you, you'll have to step some if you want to take—dad's place. He's the best father I ever met."

"Good for you, son!" exclaimed Mr. Leverett, plainly delighted. "That's the stuff! If that's the way you feel, you're all right. I don't want you to give me your affection from a sense of duty. I'm going to earn it. If I can't make you love me, then that's because I'm not worth it."

"Where's Susan?" demanded Larry, looking around. Pen, who naturally had been only a spectator during the scenes that had taken place, spoke now, "She went downstairs—Oh, here she is. Why, *Susan!*" For Susan came in bearing a big tray which had on it a cake full of lighted candles.

"If you can calm down enough to eat, here is the dessert," she announced. "It's Pen's birthday, and I think we owe her a special vote of thanks, because if it weren't for her, Larry wouldn't be here this minute! Yes, I'm going to tell now, Pen," she went on, paying no attention to Pen's protestations.

All eyes turned to the two girls, and Susan continued rapidly, "Pen had earned some money and was going to New York for the Christmas holidays. She would have had a glorious time because the Forresters are rich, and they're awfully fond of her. She was all ready to go and then she gave it up to send the money to Larry so he could come home instead. She knew mother was feeling badly about him and that we all wanted to see him again before he went off around the world in the Ellsworths' yacht. Now, I think Pen is a darling to do all that for us, don't you?"

"You bet!" exclaimed Larry fervently.

Mr. Leverett came to Pen and shook hands with her vigorously. "You did that for my Larry and for the Grahams?" he asked. "Well, you're going to have the nicest birthday and Christmas presents I can get, bless your heart!"

"Pen dear," said Mrs. Graham, "we all of us thank you ever so much more than we can say. I had no idea we owed Larry's coming to you!"

Pen was quite overwhelmed by so suddenly becoming the center of attention and by these expressions of gratitude.

"Oh, please don't say anything about it," she stammered. "I'm just as glad as you all

are. And I'm having a wonderful Christmas here with you——”

“Isn't it a lovely cake?” interrupted Pat, who was hopping up and down in her excitement. “How many candles are there, Susan?”

“Sixteen,” said Susan.

“But—how did you ever know about my birthday being the day before Christmas?” asked Pen bewildered.

“The friend who told me,” smiled Susan, “sent this along and told me to give it to you when we had the candles on the cake,” and she handed Pen a small box.

Every one watched Pen as she opened it and took out a little gold ring with a stone of turquoise in an odd and lovely setting.

“It's from Dexter,” said Pen, her face shining with delight.

“That's the December birth-stone, isn't it?” asked Susan. “What a darling ring, Pen! Put it right on. And then you have to blow out the candles and cut the cake.”

Amid much happy laughter and talking, they celebrated Pen's birthday and ate her cake.

But Pen noticed that Susan kept looking at Larry and that a shadow seemed to creep into her eyes, a shadow of sorrow and doubt. Pen herself wondered what the coming of Mr. Leverett meant in their lives. She felt in-

stinctively that it had been a hard blow to Susan to find out that Larry was not her own brother. She felt also that Susan was unhappy because she resented this stranger walking in and claiming her Larry as his own and taking him away from them into a world of wealth in which they had no place.

Finally, when they had all eaten and were still sitting around talking, Mr. Leverett said suddenly, "Larry, I'm tired of being alone. I want a family. Now, you've got as good a family right here as I ever saw or heard anything of. You're in pretty solid with them, I understand. Suppose there's any chance of them taking me in, too?"

"I don't know, sir," replied Larry smiling. "You have to measure up pretty darn high to rate a place in this family. But if they could stand me, I guess maybe they'd take you, too."

"Well, you see, I want to start off soon again for some Pacific Islands I'm interested in. I think perhaps I can pick up a clue on Rodney's trail. But I've just bought a cracking fine steam yacht, and I'd like to take all the Grahams along. I hate awfully to go alone. There's room for everybody here to go. Larry, can you get them to come?"

"Oh my!" burst out Susan, "that's exactly

what mother needs—a long sea voyage to a warmer climate! The doctor *said* so.”

“Good!” exclaimed Mr. Leverett. “Then that’s settled. We’ll start in a couple of weeks, everybody here, including the cat,” and he drew Pat and her armful of kitten close to him and hugged them. Pat beamed. She approved highly of Larry’s new father.

“Well now, look here,” protested Mr. Graham wildly, “I don’t know about this business of picking up a man’s entire family like that and walking off with them——”

“Larry,” interrupted Mr. Leverett, “you tell that dad of yours I punched his head often years ago and he’d better watch his step. If his family says they want to go with me, then he knows perfectly well it’s settled. He can come along quietly or be taken by force. And if he’s got any silly ideas in his old nut about money, you can tell him from me I owe him around a million dollars for your bringing up, and all he’s had have been a few hundred dollars every year. Now it’s time for him to collect what’s due him. And that’s all the business we’ll talk at present.”

“I think,” said Susan, “I must be dreaming. Is it really true, Larry?”

Larry smiled back. Susan looked really dazed and bewildered still.

"If it's a dream," he said, "we're all having it, and golly, it's a grand and glorious one! I'm glad I came home to-night!"

"Any room to put me up in for the night?" asked Mr. Leverett.

"Yes, indeed, there's plenty in this big house," said Mrs. Graham. "Susan will see to you, Lance. How did you get here?"

"I've got a car outside. I left it at the end of a road out here and walked the rest of the way. Have you got a barn or any place I could put it for the night? I think it's going to snow."

"Sure, we've got a barn," exclaimed Larry, "I'll go with you and show you the way now."

"It must be Pat's bed-time," said Susan, after Mr. Leverett and Larry left the room, "and mother will be all tired out from the excitement. How do you feel, mother?"

"Why, I feel like a different person, Susan," replied Mrs. Graham, "to get Larry back and to know we're not to lose him and to know that we're going to take dad out of this cold climate and you're all to have a chance to see the world is more than enough to make me feel better already!"

"Well," returned Susan, "I'm so happy I don't know which end I'm on, and I want you to go to sleep now, and perhaps you can be

dressed enough to-morrow morning to lie on the couch in the living room and have your presents with us." Susan suddenly bent over and buried her face on her mother's shoulder, "Oh, mother, it isn't Christmas without you there with us."

Then she got up again and became at once her old self, taking command as usual.

"Pat, you're coming to bed now. We'll hang up your stocking first. Then I'll come in and fix mother up for the night. In the meantime, the rest of you go downstairs and Pen can start you till I can come. Some one please carry down the plates and the rest of the cake."

"What are they going to do?" asked Pat curiously. "What's Pen going to start them doing, Susan? Oh, I don't want to go to bed, Susan!"

"Come along, Patsie dear," said Susan firmly, "you can hang up one of your red stockings, and you can have Hank with you till you go to sleep. Dad'll get him when he goes to bed. Don, you and Blair help Gardner down again—unless you're ready to go to bed, Gard?" and Susan smiled mischievously at her older brother.

"Not much, young one," retorted Gardner. "I want to be right where there's something doing so long as there is anything. Besides,

I've got an important Christmas present to finish. Good-night, mother! Go to sleep and dream of fair Pacific isles."

When they got downstairs Pen hastily stacked the cake dishes while Mr. Reeves and Blair brought in the Christmas tree and wreaths and garlands.

A few minutes later in came Larry and Mr. Leverett, brushing snow from their shoulders.

"Snowing hard!" cried Larry gleefully. "Be a foot deep by morning, I'll bet."

"Say, this is a mighty nice room!" exclaimed Mr. Leverett looking around. "About the nicest room to spend Christmas in I ever saw! What do we do next? May I help? Here, where do you want these put?" and he took from Pen several large wreaths she was carrying.

"These two are for the panels over the fireplace, on either side of the picture," explained Pen, "and then we have one for each window. But I must tie the red ribbons on these two first."

By the time Susan came down, the room had already assumed a festive air. The Christmas tree had been set up in its corner, and Mr. Reeves was making a selection of the best-looking apples.

"The first thing we always do," explained

Susan, cutting bits of string and rapidly tying them to the stem of each apple, "is to hang enough apples on each branch so it weights the branch and brings it down more horizontally. Then you can put the candles on and have them stand straight up instead of being tilted. Isn't it funny this year to have only russet apples, Larry? Usually they're all red."

"Well, you can pretend they're gold," said Mr. Leverett. "Got any extra for a poor apple-hungry man?"

"Yes, indeed, lots. Here's one that looks good," replied Susan.

"Thank you, my dear, that's a real golden one."

"Oh, tell him about the Golden Orchard, Pen," cried Larry.

"Oh yes, and the secret staircase and everything," added Susan.

And so while they worked, Mr. Leverett was told all about the happenings of the big house in the Golden Orchard. He seemed to enjoy it immensely and listened with flattering attention.

"I feel sure that treasure chest is somewhere," he said confidently. "Just wait till to-morrow, I'll help you hunt. You're just not good at exploring."

"All right, sir," said Larry, as they all laughed. "You'll sure be good if you can find it."

When the garlands and wreaths had been hung, and Pen and Susan and Larry were busy at the Christmas tree, Mr. Leverett said, "Look here, somebody please give me a pair of scissors, will you? I can't get to any stores to buy my Christmas presents, so I'll have to make them."

He sat down gravely at the big center table where Mr. Reeves was also working. "What are you doing, Aldous, old scout?"

"Slipping a little poetry-pill into my presents," smiled Mr. Reeves, writing industriously on Christmas cards.

"No poetry goes with *mine*," said Mr. Leverett decidedly, "but wait till you see the art work!"

"Better do a good one for Pen, you know she's an artist," said Larry.

"Is that so?" and Mr. Leverett looked up from his papers and the little pile of envelopes he had brought out from his traveling bag. "I knew a young artist years ago named Paul Poindexter——"

"Oh, did you?" cried Pen eagerly. "That was my father. Mr. Forrester knew him, too."

"Forrester? David Forrester?" asked Mr.

Leverett, "why, I knew him. Used to see him sometimes at Paul's place. Well, so you're Paul's little girl, eh? Funny thing how life mixes up people and things! He was a great youngster and he was doing some mighty fine work. I only wish I had some of his things now. Have you any?"

"No, only a little drawing, and then a painting Mr. Forrester gave me of mother and me when I was a baby," answered Pen.

"We'll have to see if we can't pick up some others around New York," went on Mr. Leverett. "I used to know an art dealer who's fine for digging up pictures. I'll get him on the job right away. You ought to have them if there are any to be had."

"Say, Tommy," said Larry suddenly, "I've got a few little presents in my bag. I almost forgot them. Will you help me do them up?"

"Of course, Larry. Just as soon as we finish trimming the tree," replied Susan. "There, Pen, how does it look? I think there are a few empty spaces, it's such a big tree."

"Oh, but it's lovely," exclaimed Pen, much impressed by the expert way the Grahams trimmed their tree. "Those drippy tinsel things are the nicest finishing touch."

"I wish some one would open *one* present," said Gard, who was still knitting industriously,

"I'm getting awfully curious about some of those fancy-looking packages Pen has such a stack of!"

"Look out, Pen," laughed Larry, "before you know it, you'll have opened all your presents. Gard always persuades some one to do that Christmas Eve."

"Oh, what's the difference anyhow? It's almost Christmas now," argued Gardner, "and you enjoy them more one at a time like this. To-morrow every one opens things all at once, and there's such a confusion and pandemonium, you don't know what you're getting."

"I might open the one from Funny Felix," said Pen obligingly. "That's probably just a joke. Shall I?"

"Sure. Go ahead," urged Gard. And so Pen opened the package and found a box full of delightful little candy and cracker animals of a most unusual, quaint variety.

"Aren't they lovely! I never saw any like this. They'd be just the thing to hang on the tree, Susan. We can tie string to them and they'll fill those empty spaces splendidly," said Pen. "I'm glad I opened the box to-night."

"We'd better go to bed," exclaimed Susan suddenly, when the last ornament had been

hung in place, and all the litter of paper and string cleared away, "you know, Pat will get up early, and after she's up, there'll be no sleep for the rest of us."

"I haven't finished mother's scarf," said Gard reluctantly.

"Well, never mind, you can do it before breakfast. We won't open the presents until afterwards, and anyhow even if it isn't all done, you can explain to mother and finish it during the day. Everybody ought to be in bed now, it's almost twelve o'clock."

But she and Pen talked longer than usual after they got to bed that memorable night.

"I can hardly believe it, Pen," said Susan softly. "Just imagine Larry not being really my brother at all! And there we always thought he was one of the family as much as anything. And now to have a father turn up worth millions of dollars! Mr. Leverett doesn't look that way, does he?"

"Well, no, he doesn't," admitted Pen, "but I like him ever so much. He's like Larry, only older."

Just before Susan fell asleep, she giggled suddenly, "Oh, Pen, I used to make fun of you for expecting to find a treasure chest, because it was so romantic and silly, and now this that's happened, is much more wonderful, isn't it? Pen,

I'm so glad you were here with us when it happened! And oh, so glad you made me take the money to get Larry home in time for Christmas. To-morrow's going to be fun, too. What do you suppose Mr. Leverett put in those envelopes for us?"

"He was drawing pictures of the things he's going to get after Christmas. He showed me Pat's—it was a lovely big doll house with everything in it. He wanted to know if I thought she'd like that."

"Oh my, I guess she will," said Susan, yawning. "Good-night, Pen, wake me if I oversleep. . . ."

CHAPTER XVII

THE TREASURE CHEST IS FOUND

PEN was waked next morning by a shout of "Merry Christmas!" and opening her eyes, she found Pat climbing into bed with them. From all over the house came echoes of "Merry Christmas," called from one room to another.

Susan, waking also, lay for a moment trying to remember everything that had happened the evening before. Then she jumped out of bed, "I can't believe Larry is really here," she exclaimed, as she started to dress hurriedly.

No one could remain sleepy that morning, and it was not long before the whole family was downstairs ready for the day's fun. Pat's excitement when she saw the transformed living room and the gaily-decorated tree was boundless. It even robbed her of the power to speak for a moment. But once she started in to express her delight, there was no stopping her. She was finally driven to talking into Hank's ear when no one else would listen. But Hank himself almost went crazy with excitement. He had never had so much to play with in his short



"THE OPENING OF THE CHRISTMAS PRESENTS BEGAN."

life, and while the presents were being unwrapped, he dashed about in a perfect sea of delightfully rustling papers and empty boxes till his little tongue hung out and he panted with fatigue.

"When do we start on the Christmas presents?" asked Mr. Leverett, as they sat around the breakfast table.

"Not till the dishes are done and the beds made and we've got mother fixed up on the couch," replied Susan promptly.

"Oh, let's hurry," exclaimed Pat, pushing back her chair and starting to carry dishes to the kitchen.

"Will you get mother's tray?" asked Susan. Larry was off like a shot, and all the rest set to work under Susan's directions, with the result that in a very short time they were all gathered in the living room and the opening of the Christmas presents began.

There was a great confusion and pandemonium, as Gard had prophesied, and Pen, who had never participated in this kind of a Christmas before, kept forgetting to look at her own things, so interested was she in watching the others. There were constant cries of "Oh, Pen, look at this!" and "Oh, isn't that lovely?"

The very first present Pen unwrapped was one from Dexter. And when she held in her

hands a beautifully bound, dark blue book and read "*The Golden Pomegranate* by Dexter Alan," she forgot for a moment where she was and her thoughts swung back to the previous summer when she and Dexter had worked so hard over this very book.

She opened it and on the flyleaf read in Dexter's writing, "The very first copy goes to you, Sammie, for it's your book as well as mine. With grateful love, Dexter." And as if this were not happiness enough, Pen, turning on, came to the dedication page and there, to her surprise—for Dexter had given her no hint of it—she found printed "To Penelope Poin-dexter, without whose inspiration and help this book would never have been written."

"Well," thought Pen, "if I didn't have a single other present, this would be enough to make it a wonderful Christmas!"

But she did have other presents, and it seemed to her that each was more beautiful than the last.

"Pen!" exclaimed Susan, "will you look at these lovely things your Forresters sent me: A silk sport skirt and the stunningest green tie to go with it. It's just the color of the scarf Gard made me! And see what Mr. Leverett has drawn here, will you? A wrist watch, which is just what I want badly, and a sailboat! Larry

must have told him how much I have always wanted one! Isn't that glorious, Pen?"

"Oh, Susan, that's lovely! And he's given me a wrist watch, too," cried Pen. "I hope they'll be just alike, don't you? But, look, I've got a birthday present from him, too—a *fur coat!*"

"That's grand," replied Susan. "But do show me every single thing the Forresters sent you, and *everything* you got. I'm going to stay right here till I see them all. But first, I must thank you for the sketch of Larry. You couldn't have given me anything I'd rather have. I showed it to Mr. Leverett and he thinks you're wonderful. He'd like one too, I guess."

"Well, I'd be glad to do another better one," replied Pen readily. "Now let's see. I showed you Dexter's book and the dedication, didn't I? Well, besides that, he sent me this gorgeous pair of leather gauntlet gloves lined with fur. I've got so many things I don't know where to begin. The box of paper with my initials in blue is from Lucie and the big box of chocolates is from the twins. Ingham gave me this darling gold fountain pen with my initials engraved on it. See, it has a ribbon to hang it on around my neck. And look, aren't these the daintiest things?—from

Daphne," and she showed Susan a set of sheer white, delicately embroidered and hemstitched underwear, nightgown and chemise. With them were a silk vest of pale silk and a pair of black silk stockings.

"My, they *are* beautiful," admired Susan, "What's that other little package, Pen?"

"Oh, that's from Mr. and Mrs. Forrester. Just wait till you see it!" Pen took out of a little blue leather case a thin gold chain with a pendant of aquamarine.

"It's like moonlight on the water, isn't it?"

"It's sweet," said Susan, "and you've still got other things. Show me the rest, Pen."

"Well, this is a book from Mr. Clayton, with wonderful pictures in color. It's a history of painting," went on Pen, "and here are my things from home. Two pretty handkerchiefs from Evelyn, a box of writing paper from Uncle Lije, and two aprons and an embroidered collar and cuff set from Aunt Emily. And, Susan, that perfectly lovely old sampler from you!"

"I found it in the attic," said Susan frankly, "and I knew you'd like it better than a ten-cent-store present, which was all I could have bought."

"Well, I do. It's one of the quaintest and most elaborate I ever saw. I love it because

it has a picture of this house and trees with yellow apples on them. You ought to keep it, Susan, and have it framed and hung in the front hall."

"I don't know whether we're coming back here to live or not," said Susan, "but I hate to think of giving up this house. It would make a lovely summer place——"

"That's what it's going to be, Tommy," interrupted Larry, who had come up at that moment. "My father is going to buy it and fix it all up and give it to mother."

And so there seemed nothing lacking to make that the most wonderful Christmas Day.

After showing Susan her presents, Pen went the rounds, thanking them all for her gifts—Pat for the little bag of fragrant bayberry leaves; Gardner for the quaint, old-fashioned pottery vase which he explained was to hold her brushes and pencils while she worked; Blair for the box of fudge (which Pen knew Susan had made); Larry for the lovely little unframed landscape printed in Switzerland which he had bought in a picture store in New York; and Mr. Reeves for the book of collected poems all about the sea.

On her progress around the room, she was obliged to see and admire the gifts of all the others, and she learned many delightful things.

Gard had completely lost the unhappy, frustrated look she had noticed when first she met him. He showed her his slip of paper from Mr. Leverett which gave him his longed-for college education, with a promise of further study abroad. Blair's sullenness, too, had disappeared, for Mr. Leverett, given a hint by Larry, had made Blair's Christmas present the mining engineering course he had set his heart on.

"Did you see what Mr. Leverett gave Don and dad?" whispered Susan to Pen. "It's some shares in something. I don't know how much, but it means a good income always for both of them."

"Well," said Mr. Leverett finally, stretching himself, "how about a little fresh air? Any one here who can go out in the snow without melting?"

"Yes, sir, all of us!"

"Come on then, let's take a walk before dinner and get up an appetite."

"It's still snowing," cried Pat, "look, it's an awful storm. And it's deep, too. We'll have to go on snowshoes."

"Oh—but I haven't any," cried Mr. Leverett.

"You can have mine," said Gard promptly, "I can't go."

Everybody except Mrs. Graham and Gard, and Susan who wanted to see to dinner, went off for a tramp in the snow. Pen wore her new fur-lined gloves and rejoiced in their cozy warmth. The snow that was already on the ground was too soft and fresh, and the snow that was falling too thick and blinding, to make a long walk pleasant. Pat gave out first, and she and Pen turned back, while the men continued, saying they would be home in an hour or so.

When they reached the house, Pen hurried to help Susan in the kitchen and Pat eagerly betook herself to the living room to examine her presents all over again.

“Remember my saying I wished some one would give me a Christmas present of a trip to a sunny island in the Pacific?” asked Susan. “I certainly never had a wild wish so promptly fulfilled as that one. Just think, Pen! And you’re coming with us, aren’t you?”

“Oh, Susan, I wish I could! But, of course, Aunt Emily wouldn’t possibly let me go off on a long trip like that. Oh dear, I shall miss you all. Promise you’ll write to me, Susan, *often!*”

“Of course, I will, Pen,” returned Susan, “and I don’t believe we’ll be gone so long either. Mr. Leverett said he would make ar-

rangements for buying this house right away, and put it in the hands of some one to restore and fit up with the right kind of furniture while we're gone, and *perhaps* we'll come back by next July and spend the summer here!"

"I hope you do," said Pen fervently. "Then we'll have a wonderful time together."

After dinner, Mr. Leverett, who seemed to have as much energy as Larry, insisted upon exploring the house and being shown the secret room and the passage which led to the Cupboard Room. He carried a flashlight and went alone, saying he wanted to examine every inch of the walls and woodwork in the secret passage. The rest of them waited, grouped around a lantern which they had set on the floor of the little secret room.

They had been talking and laughing, but after a bit there was a sudden silence. They listened for sounds of Mr. Leverett but he was evidently at the farther end of the passage. Pen was opposite the door of the closet which stood wide open.

Suddenly she saw the back of the closet move—shelves and all! It opened a crack at one side, swung a little farther, and then a hand appeared. In the gloomy little dungeon of a

room, it was an uncanny sight, and Pen's scalp prickled.

"Look," she half whispered, "the cupboard!"

As the rest turned to see what her startled expression meant, the opening in the closet became still larger, and Mr. Leverett's head appeared.

"Hullo there," he exclaimed smiling. "You never told me about this part! I've found your old treasure chest too!" He pushed the whole back of the cupboard out at an angle, and came out into the room himself. The Grahams and Pen crowded around excitedly while he pulled forward a big wooden chest.

"Not so bad for one of my advanced years, eh, Larry?" he asked complacently, as they examined the solid-looking box with its discolored brass hinges and rough carvings.

"Let's take it down to the living room," exclaimed Susan. "It's just too stifling and close up here. We want mother and Gard to see us open it."

They climbed hastily up the ladder to the attic and the boys hoisted up the newly found treasure chest and carried it down to the living room. There they set it down on the hearth and gathered about, eager to see the contents.

"But it's locked. How'll we ever open it?" exclaimed Larry.

"Get an axe," suggested Blair.

"You won't have to do that," put in Mr. Reeves. "Here's the key!" and he took his hand from his pocket and held out an old brass key.

There was a moment of blank astonishment.

"Why, Aldous Bailey Reeves!" cried Susan, "how did you ever in the world get that key?"

"Great guns, Don! What have you been keeping from us?" asked Gard.

"You're a good one——" The air was full of exclamations of astonishment and indignation.

Mr. Reeves continued to smile, undisturbed by the curiosity and excitement he had aroused.

"Why, not long after you found the secret passage," he said calmly, "I explored it myself and I found the sliding panel that leads from the passage into the space back of the closet in the secret room. And I found the chest. It was open, and the only thing inside was——" he paused while they hung on his words breathlessly.

"——the key."

A long "Oh!" of disappointment was heard.

Mr. Reeves smiled, "I knew it would be a sad blow to the romantic treasure seekers not to find any Spanish gold, so I decided to say nothing and let you at least have the fun of continuing to hunt for the treasure chest."

Larry unlocked the chest and opened it. It was absolutely empty.

"Well," said Mr. Graham cheerfully, "the only thing for us to do is to fill it ourselves with something interesting for our descendants to find when they go treasure hunting."

"I think some one ought to write up the Story of the Golden Orchard for the treasure chest," suggested Mrs. Graham.

As they sat around talking, Hank walked into the center of the circle, and sniffed curiously at the big box. Then with a quick spring, he jumped into the empty chest and sat calmly down to wash himself. Every one laughed.

"Hank doesn't care whether it has gold in it or not," said Susan. "I don't either. It's such a wonderful Christmas, I don't care anything about old treasure chests."

"Good for you, Tommy, neither do I," said Larry.

"Let's light the candles on the tree now," said Mrs. Graham. "It's just dusk, and they'll look lovely."

Mr. Leverett, Larry and Mr. Reeves soon had all the little candles lighted. Pen, sitting on the floor between Susan and Larry, gazed on it entranced. It seemed to her the most beautiful tree in the world, with its glitter and sparkle of ornaments, and the misty radiance of each little flame against the soft dark green branches. She could hear the rattle of icy sleet against the east windows, the howl of the wind, rising and falling, and the steady murmuring roar of the surf. Inside, the room was warm and fragrant with the smell of balsam and evergreens.

Pen, twisting her new little ring on her finger and glancing about at the contented faces of the Grahams with Larry and his father, all gazing steadily and dreamily at the glowing radiance of the Christmas Tree, felt that her sacrifice in giving up her trip to New York had turned out to be no sacrifice at all.

"That's the loveliest tree we ever had," remarked Susan.

"You say that every year," said Gardner, with good-natured scorn.

"I know it," replied Susan, "but this year it really is."

"I'm quite sure it's the most beautiful one I ever saw," said Mr. Leverett decidedly. "I want to come and have one here every Christ-

mas. I don't think there's any other place in the world better for a Christmas tree than this room, and no other people in the world quite so fine to celebrate Christmas with, eh, Larry?"

"Next year," said Mrs. Graham, "we'll have Rodney, too. I feel sure we will, Lance."

"I believe so, too, Helen," he replied soberly. "I feel new hope now I'm going to have Larry and the rest of you to help."

"Oh, look at Hank!" cried Pat, "doesn't he look funny?"

The kitten was sitting straight up in the empty treasure chest, staring with round, saucer-like eyes at the glittering Christmas tree with its many lights. His look of fascinated astonishment was so comical that every one laughed.

THE END.

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